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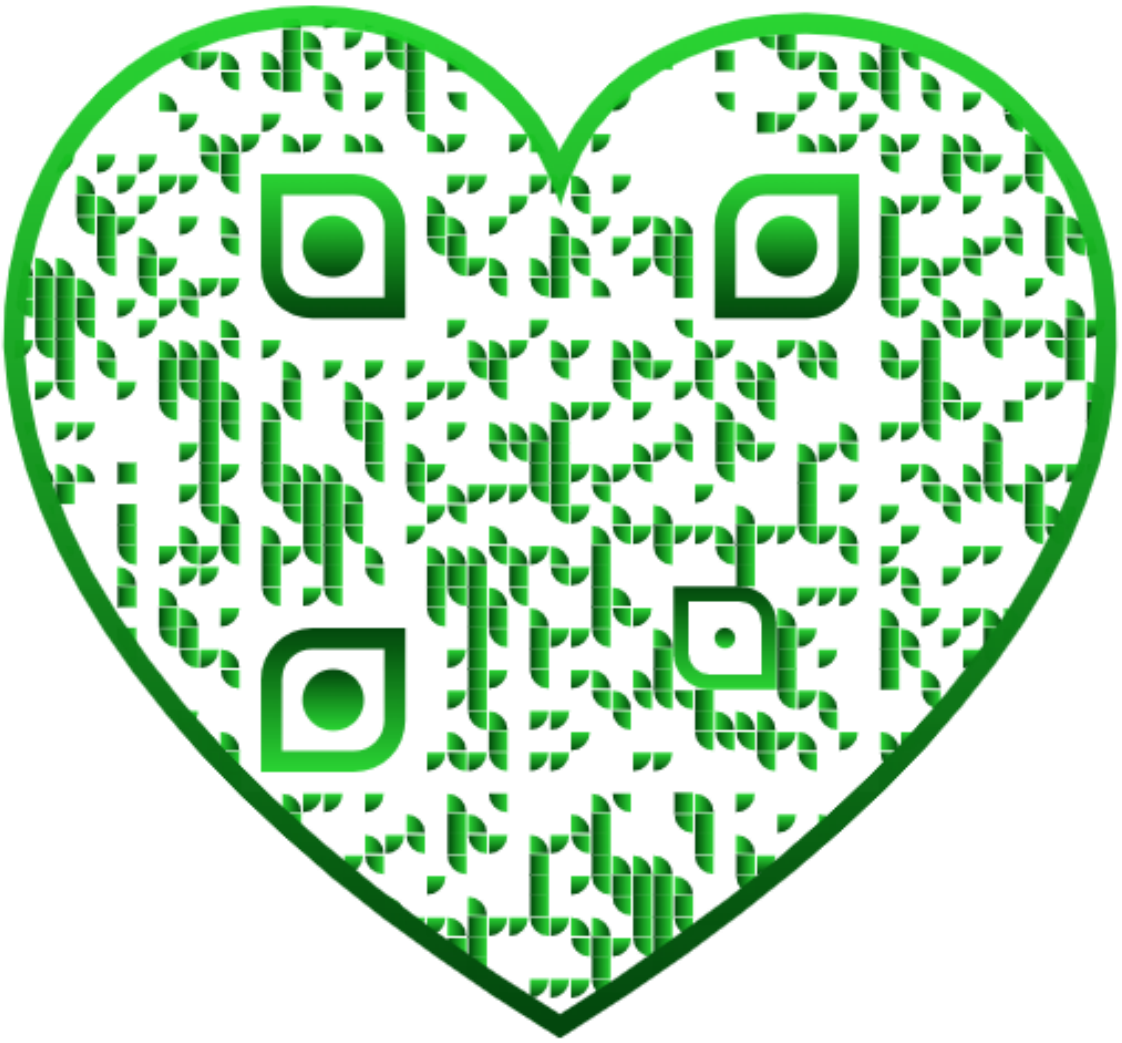

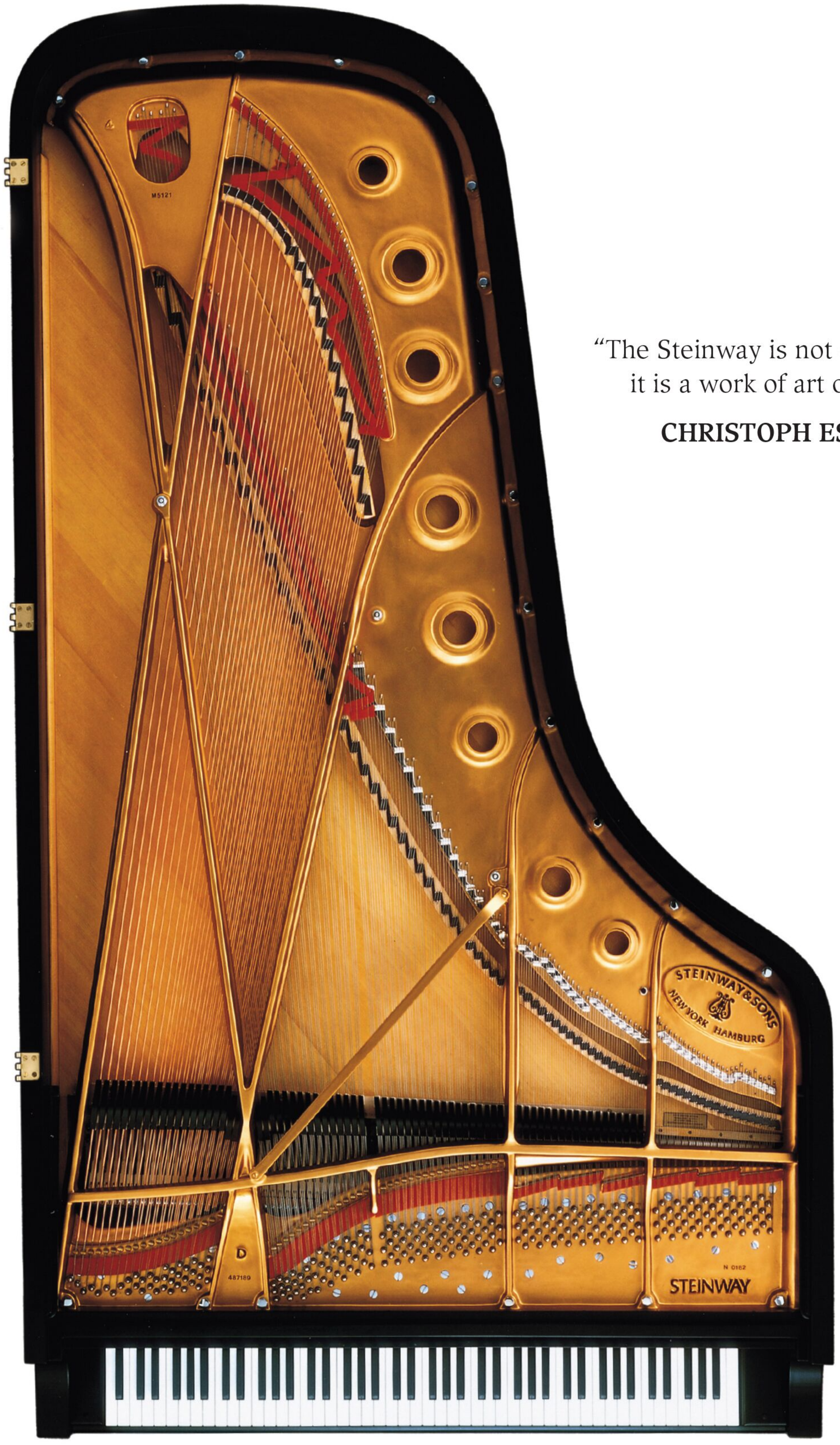


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October-November 2023

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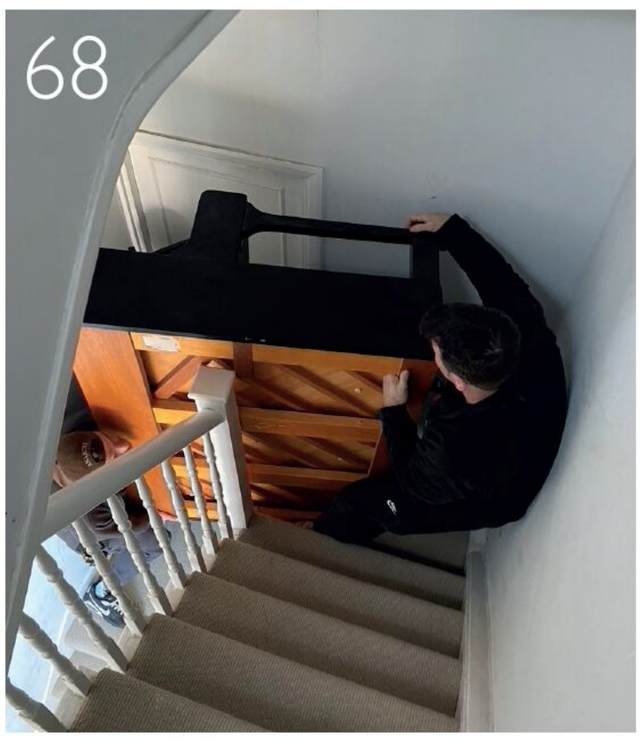

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# Looping and learning

One of the joys of my job is talking to many people from different walks of life, and hearing their stories. Everyone has something to teach me. The two winners of *Pianist*'s inaugural online amateur piano competition shared with me the challenges they have faced when learning the piano. Homemaker and piano teacher Annie Kwon was the winner of our Classical category. As an excellent sight-reader, continually juggling a hectic schedule, she finds it difficult to really get to know a piece, rather than skating through it and moving on to the next. Software engineer Rob Rennie was the winner of our Modern category. For him, practice and improvement is all about trying to coax the perfect sound out of an instrument that's 'all wood and steel', as he puts it.

Each of us has our own Achilles' heel. For me, it's the trill. (I tend to focus on it so much that the poor fingers of the other hand suffer the consequences.) Help is always available – whether from teachers, pianist colleagues, online tutorials – or even the pages of *Pianist*. The solutions we find have to work for us as individuals. Our cover artist Bruce Liu, winner of the 2021 Chopin Piano Competition, says he's much better at memorising in the mornings, for example. He has another great piece of advice when it comes to learning a new piece – not more than one or two pages per day – which is echoed by this issue's 'Pianist at Work' artist, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet. Mark Tanner follows suit in his masterclass on tricky passages. We should work on tiny parts and then use his 'looping' technique to slip them into the music. The aim is for the bars you always feared to become your favourite parts of the piece!

I hope that you get as much as I did from investigating the fascinating figure of Elie Robert Schmitz, a Franco-American pianist, composer and teacher. Coming across his remarkable recording of the Debussy Préludes, I wanted to learn more about the man, and to share it with you. He has so much of value to pass on, from techniques for absorbing a page of score to understanding our 'pianist muscles', and the important role they play in making the sound we want to produce.

Learning is a lifelong process, but a daily one, as well. When it comes to my troublesome trills, I will give Mark Tanner's looping strategy a go. It can't hurt, and I certainly can't wait to enjoy my trilling.

Erica

**editor@pianistmagazine.com**

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**PUBLISHER**
Warners Group Publications plc
Director: Stephen Warner
Publisher: Collette Lloyd

**EDITORIAL**
Warners Group Publications plc
West Street, Bourne, Lincs PE10 9PH, UK
Editor: Erica Worth
editor@pianistmagazine.com
Tel: +44 (0)20 7266 0760
Editorial Assistant & Online Editor: Ellie Palmer
ellie.palmer@warnersgroup.co.uk
Marketing: Collette Lloyd
collette.lloyd@warnersgroup.co.uk
Senior Designer: Nathan Ward

**ADVERTISING**
Advertising Manager: Mark Dean
mark.dean@warnersgroup.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1778 395084
Mobile: +44 (0)7503 707023

**READER SERVICES**

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Pianist Subscriptions Department
Warners Group Publications plc
West Street, Bourne, Lincs PE10 9PH, UK
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Fax: +44 (0)1778 421706
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**FOR ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES**
Contact: Collette Lloyd, Publisher
Warners Group Publications plc
West Street, Bourne, Lincs PE10 9PH, UK
Tel: +44 (0)7920 713998


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## STAR LETTER

### Sky's the limit

After many years of believing other people played piano, no matter how much I admired them and wished I could learn too, I settled on the idea that it would be too difficult for me. However, a surprise gift changed that unfortunate mindset…

It was just at the start of the pandemic, Mach 2020, when my pianist daughter presented me with a gift. As I opened the bag, confusion filed my mind – the unlikely gift was a piano course book for adult beginners. It took a while to connect the dots as she confirmed she was going to teach me, with my first lesson starting the next day! I was filled with excitement and anxiety! Could I really learn to play the piano? I began learning from scratch the very next day – all I knew was middle C!

After weekly lessons with my daughter for 18 months, some time learning on my own and now a new teacher, I can play pieces up to ABRSM Grade 4, and have developed a love for composers such as Chopin, Clementi, Bach and Rameau. Piano is a huge part of my life now with dedicated daily study and I truly believe, if the passion is there, anyone can learn!

The outcome of such a surprise gift exceeded both our expectations. I promptly subscribed to the *Pianist* magazine as a real pianist!

**Karen McCarthy, London, UK**

*What an inspiring story! A surprise CD prize is on its way to you.*

### Words of wisdom

How often do you ask a sympathetic and indulgent friend or relative if they wouldn't mind listening to a piece you're practising, cautioning them before you even sit at the piano that it is 'only work in progress' before proceeding to a halting performance punctuated by apologetic comments and frustrated exclamations? If so, I would ask you to heed the advice given in the last issue of *Pianist*: 'When performing surely the aim should be to show ourselves at our best, rather than to demonstrate what we cannot yet do.' (Mark Tanner) and 'Play the music that appeals, that you love and that you can manage under your fingers. Be kind to yourself.' (Erica Worth). Wise words indeed.

**Joseph Laredo, Milton Keynes, UK**

### Fuzzy memory

I was interested to read that Alice Sara Ott (issue 132 cover) is looking forward to recording all the John Field Nocturnes. This brought to mind an incident in the late 1970s, when I was invited by the family of Robson Lowe, the distinguished philatelist, postal historian, and auctioneer, to play one of my own piano miniatures at his memorial service.

The venue was St James's Church, Piccadilly, and I had been asked to perform in the middle of the proceedings. Naturally, I was very conscious of not letting down Robbie, and the circa 300 people present. When the minister then asked me to play at the end instead, this rather threw me and, after a few minutes, I confessed in a whisper to my girlfriend that I had completely forgotten the melody. She kindly assured me that I would remember it, when the time came. The service over, the minister announced that a friend of Robbie (I had asked to remain anonymous) would now play a short piece in his memory. I walked to the impressively large grand piano. After three dismal attempts to perform, and three failures, as I could not get past the first chord, I heard a voice inside me shouting 'Run!'. The next thing I remember was walking back to my row, seeing my partner in tears, and apologising profusely to her for ruining the day.

'No,' she said, 'You attempted your piece three times, paused, then perfectly played that other miniature of yours you played to me a few weeks ago!' This came as a complete shock, and an astonishing relief, as I remembered nothing of playing the second piece. It must have been some unconscious survival instinct. A man then approached me, a Director of Christie's Auctions, who said, 'Excuse me, I did enjoy that piece – was it a nocturne by John Field?' I had to tell him the truth.

**Gavin Littaur, London, UK**


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# Anything but amateur

The entries for the first online *Pianist* Amateur Piano Competition exceeded the expectations of editor **Erica Worth**, who explains how it all came about – and, of course, who won!

**It all began some 20 years ago,** when I was reading about the many competitions in the US designed specifically for amateur pianists over the age of 30. I knew that *Pianist* had to do something similar and in 2005 we set up a similar competition with partners Yamaha, culminating in a glittering Finals gala evening held at London's Cadogan Hall. Much has changed over the years – YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and the rest spreading like wildfire, so it made sense to reinvent the wheel – this time we'd run an *online* competition, inviting applicants to record themselves via video. Yamaha jumped on board again, and we were nearly set.

My first step was to approach two trusted colleagues from the music industry – Melanie Spanswick and Matt Ash – to ask if they'd be interested in sharing the preliminary judging duties with me. No persuasion was required: they loved the idea and the competition was born.

After that, it was plain sailing. We wanted the competition criteria to be as simple as possible: There would be two categories, Classical and Modern (hence, two winners). Anyone over the age of 25 and of any nationality could enter, as long as they were *not* professional performers. Entrants should play a minimum of two pieces, preferably showing different styles. When ready, they would upload their videos online. Simple.

The prize? The winners would each receive a Yamaha upright piano worth up to £10,000 and a package of online exposure to help kickstart a dream career. The competition was launched on 1 March 2023, with a deadline of early July. Lots of time to prepare, then.

## Decisions, decisions

Playing the piano in front of a camera and judges isn't one of life's easier challenges. It takes plenty of time, at least a measure of technique, a healthy dash of confidence and – unavoidably – a sprinkling of talent. So imagine how thrilled we were when, come mid-July, we counted up over 90 entries! There were Beethoven sonatas, Bach fugues, Chopin nocturnes, Debussy préludes, composers unfamiliar plus doses of Latin, jazz, movie music and Coldplay – from a range of pianists young and old, from all walks of life and from all corners of the globe.

Melanie, Matt and myself carefully listened to all the applicants, from beginning to end. We were extremely organised and concentrated in our judging. 'What was so impressive,' remarked Melanie, 'was the amount of time that people must have spent doing this. Some of these performances were so heartfelt, obviously meaning so much to so many people, that it made the whole judging process so worthwhile.' Said Matt: 'Whilst everything was not going to be top quality, we recognise that even those performing for the first time were doing it with real integrity and love.' Via phone and email we compared notes, narrowing down the entries to a 31-strong shortlist.

## And the winner is

Here's where finals judges Chloe Flower, Kathryn Page and Iyad Sughayer took over. I am delighted to say they were pretty unanimous in their decisions. The Classical category Prize was awarded to 38-year-old Annie Kwon, a homemaker and piano teacher from California, USA, who performed works by Liszt, Scarlatti, Sibelius and Babajanian. Kathryn Page enjoyed her effervescent clarity in the Sibelius Etude and her instinctive phrasing in the Liszt *Widmung*. She found Annie's Scarlatti 'sparkling and bubbly playing – exactly what was needed.' To summarise, 'An extremely persuasive performance, Annie communicates all the musical needs with beauty of sound and effortless control. Bravo!' Chloe Flower was equally moved by Annie's natural musicality and her emotive performance, mentioning a great technique and a wonderful way in bringing out the inner voices.

The Modern category Prize went to 53-year-old Rob Rennie, a software engineer, also from California. He wowed the judges with a mixed bag of works by Monk, Mingus, Powell and Evans. Page found his Mingus *Better Get Hit in Your Soul* full of rhythmic and exciting energy, exuding an obvious love for the piece being communicated. In Monk's *Monk's Dream* she found 'very atmospheric playing, with space and shape used effectively. A subtle rhythmic thread held it together with conviction.' And in Evans's *Epilogue* she was persuaded by 'gentle and sensitive playing, creating a very wistful shape and a wonderful conclusion to the programme.' Chloe Flower was also taken with his passion and feeling for the music.

## THE RESULTS

### Classical

**Winner** Annie Kwon
**Second** Michael Nagel
**Third** Zachary Weiner
**Special mention** Noah DeGarmo; Andrzej Janiga, Elena Smekalova, Takako Ujike

### Modern

**Winner** Rob Rennie
**Second** Abraham Hernandez
**Third** Ray Charles Bozeman

*Names of the 31 finalists can be found at www.pianistmagazine.com*

## Finding new confidence

Glowing remarks from some tough critics. The winners themselves were thrilled but also shocked by the accolades. 'I was totally not expecting to win', exclaimed Annie, when I called her to tell the news. 'Initially I was only going to play three pieces: Liszt, Scarlatti, Sibelius. But then I randomly came across the Arno Babajanian *Elegy*, and it just stuck to me. I had two months to prepare that one!' Having received her bachelor's degree at the University of California, Irvine, Annie took a break from the piano: 'I graduated in 2007, but after that I hadn't performed or played in 17 years. I had a love-hate relationship with piano. I felt it was expected of me. Now I have a new love for it.' Today she juggles the life of a mother of three young children with that of part-time piano teacher. 'When I told the children I'd won, they were so excited,' she explains. 'They said there were so proud of me and that they told all their friends!' Has winning the competition changed things? 'It's now made me think: Can I put my foot in the door again? Can I? Should I? Maybe to have a social media presence and to perform again. I never really had that confidence. I think one of my strengths is sight-reading; I can learn a piece pretty fast, but the problem with that is that I never really *know* a piece. This time around I really want to get into the theory and harmony. That's my goal. That's my new challenge.'

Rob Rennie was equally shocked when informed of his victory: 'Surprised would be an understatement,' he laughed. 'It's mind-blowing. I read your magazine, cover to cover, I try to sight-read the scores first, without listening, and listen to the CD afterwards in the car. I have been reading it since issue 87.' Music to this writer's ears, naturally. Unlike Annie, Rob was self-taught: 'I started by teaching myself in my late teens. Then I had private lessons for four or five years with two different teachers who were so instrumental in everything I became. The first taught me blues and the second teacher was a specialist in bebop. For me, the piano is all about wood and steel… and it's amazing to me the way that different people can make a different sound. That's my thing. That's what I am working on. I play two hours every day, and that's for almost 35 years now. I don't like to go on vacation unless there's a piano where I am staying!'

What next for this dedicated pianist? 'You never think you're good, you always doubt yourself… it's nice to get some recognition after all these years! I am looking to leverage this a little to get into some more solo gigs. I had a trio of my own before the pandemic, but that ceased. My niece says she's going to call me an international award-winning pianist now!'

Annie and Rob will be receiving their piano prizes shortly, and we'll keep you posted as to their new online exposure. Piano competitions are never cut and dried affairs – and certainly not foregone conclusions – and decisions made by judges or critics will always be subjective. The comprehensive list of results appears in the box opposite and all 31 finalists' names can be found on the *Pianist* website.

Finally, I must say a heartfelt thank you, if not in person, to everyone who entered: competitions are nothing without competitors! If your name isn't mentioned, please don't be discouraged – we were impressed by so many entries. Watch this space: we are sure to launch the next amateur piano competition very soon. ■


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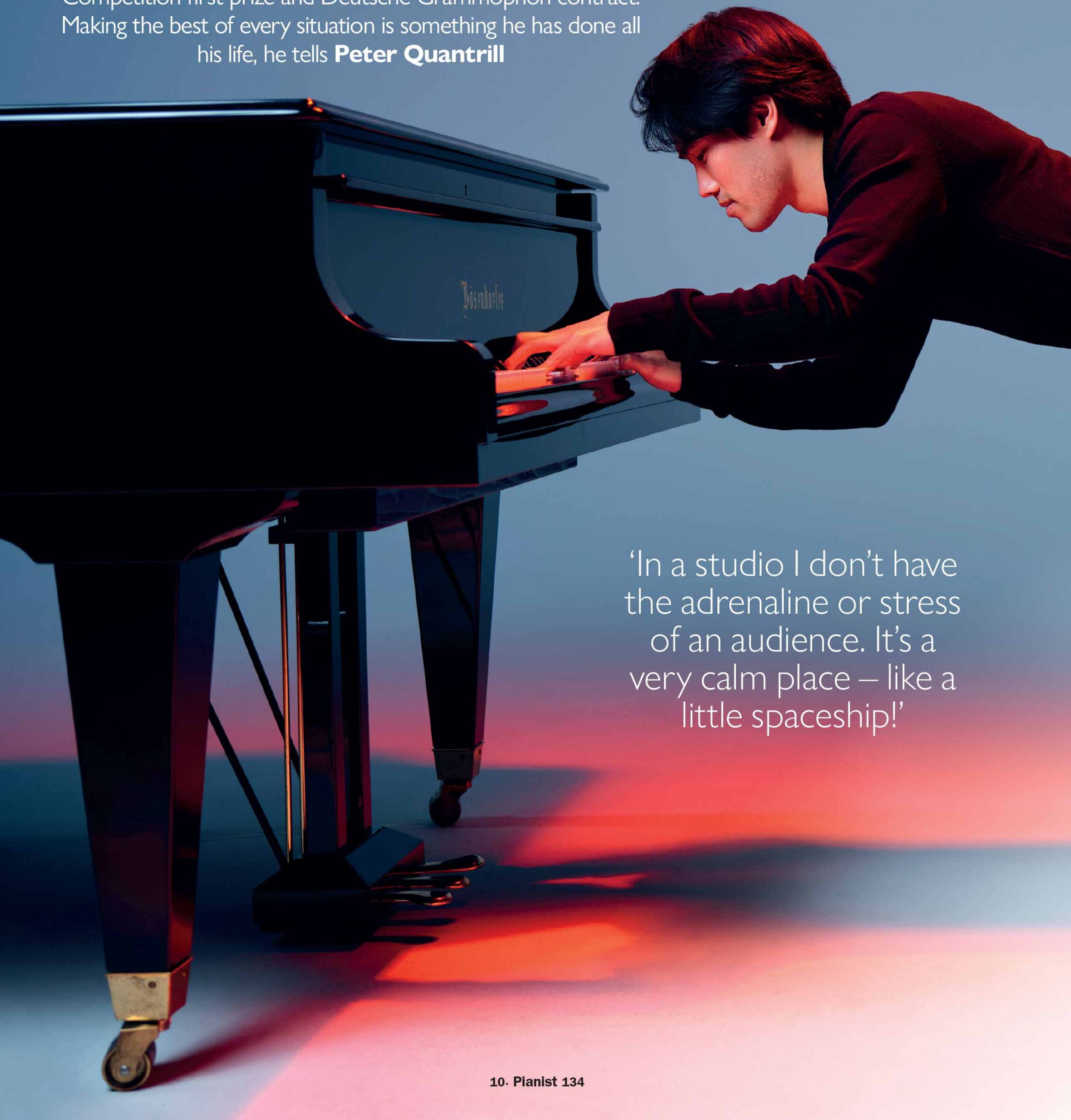
INTERVIEW

# BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

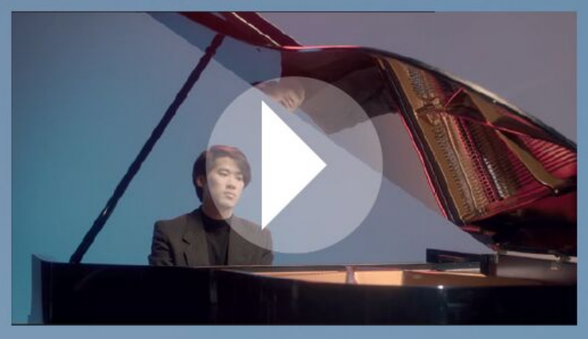
Bruce Liu has every reason to be positive, with a Chopin Competition first prize and Deutsche Grammophon contract. Making the best of every situation is something he has done all his life, he tells **Peter Quantrill**



‘In a studio I don’t have the adrenaline or stress of an audience. It’s a very calm place – like a little spaceship!’

**TAP TO WATCH**
Bruce Liu plays Chopin Concerto No 1

**TAP TO WATCH**
Bruce Liu plays Rameau



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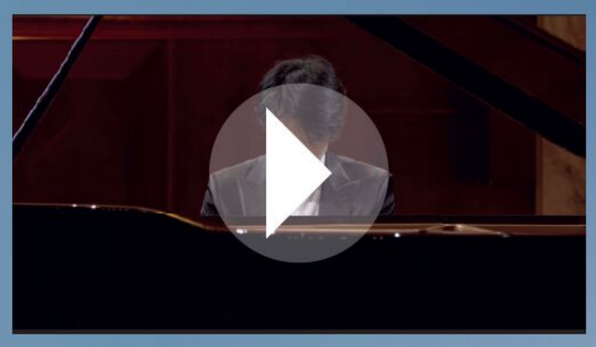
Bruce Liu plays Chopin



Everyone has their own story of how they sat down at a piano for the first time. For Bruce Liu, it was a hyperactive inclination that brought him in front of the keys. Less than 15 years later, he had the gold medal of the 2021 Chopin Competition in Warsaw hanging around his neck. Now he has a DG contract, and a new album of French music, spanning Rameau to Ravel, with its own story to tell.

Born in Paris to Chinese parents, Liu grew up in Montreal, capital of Quebec in Canada. This transcontinental heritage – part Asian, part European, part American – is reflected in his easy manner over a Zoom call from his home. He still lives in Montreal, even if making a new home in Europe would oil the wheels of his career.

Liu practises on a Steinway at home but still goes into the Montreal Conservatory where he was a student: 'It can be hard to practise at home. You're in your comfort zone there, it's easy to do something else after a short time. So sometimes it's not very efficient. I think the beauty of the piano is that we have so many instruments available to us. Sometimes playing on a worse piano can actually be better for us.'

How so? 'Well, for example, in the Chopin competition, we were lucky to have a Clavinova in our hotel room, to make sure that we had a guarantee of time at the keyboard. And I was actually very happy to play on a Clavinova for my whole stay there.' Liu's philosophy was that the more 'limiting' the piano you practise on, 'the better you feel on stage; you're suddenly so inspired, and you feel that everything is so good.'

## Page by page

Though Liu is a night owl by instinct, the demands of a rapidly rising concert career have driven him to discipline his time. 'Working in the morning is better for memorising pieces, for example. The student life of having a huge period of time to learn a piece or two, that's over. Now the challenge is to use these little gaps between concerts or even on the day of a concert. Jean-Efflam Bavouzet taught me how to use those little times. Learning a concerto, for example, can be done in one page or two pages a day. You can do that in 30 minutes while backstage. And after a month, you realise that the concerto is under your fingers.'

Surely this approach works better for some pieces than others. 'Of course. Some music looks relatively easy on the surface, but it takes time to get inside your body. Late Beethoven and Schubert sonatas require a chemistry change in your head, rather than just learning the notes. Liszt is very hard to learn, but somehow, it's there once it's in your hands.'

The same could be said for the music of Charles-Valentin Alkan, beloved of pianophiles with a taste for rare and super-virtuoso repertoire. *Le festin d'Ésope* is the last piece in Alkan's collection of 12 Studies in All the Minor Keys Op 39, and it forms the climax of Liu's new album for DG, *Waves*.

## Bruce Liu:
### My first teachers

Piano was just a hobby at the beginning. I was always moving around and shouting, like a kid. Piano was a way to keep me quiet and seated for 15 or 30 minutes, at least to begin with. My dad found my first teacher from an advert in the newspaper. She was super nice, super patient, very engaging. I think this was very important. In the early stages, the actual teaching method is less important than building an interest and a love for music.

Then I entered a pre-college class at the conservatoire, and my teacher there was more serious. I became fascinated by the scores, the meaning of every symbol and how to shape a line. And so I became a piano nerd until I was 18 or 19. And then my last teacher came along at the end of my teenage years, at a time when you start to have your own personality and your own view on music and the world. He gave me a lot more freedom and guidance: less about specific details, more about the art of music and the art of piano playing. I feel I was lucky to have these very specific kinds of mentors at the right time.

Pianists do not stumble across Alkan's music by accident: it is a destination not marked on the standard tourist maps, as it were. Once they arrive, pianists and listeners want to return.

'For me, it's always been a dream to play Alkan,' says Liu. 'As a young boy, I always wanted to play something very complex, energetic and technically challenging.' He began listening to Alkan's music years ago: 'It sounded tonal, it sounded like Liszt, it sounded like Ravel. It sounded like a mixture of all the weird composers we don't usually play. After a little research, I realised how many other composers were influenced by him.'

To a degree, Alkan was his own worst enemy, burying fantastically evocative music within volumes which hardly hint at the vivid imagery of his keyboard writing: collections of Préludes and Etudes, the Concerto for Solo Piano and *Esquisses*. Such an approach did the posthumous reception of Chopin no harm, but then neither did his early death from tuberculosis, whereas Alkan became a recluse before dying in March 1888 at the age of 74, buried in Montmartre.

### Games in the studio

If Alkan represents one culmination of the French piano tradition, Ravel embodies another, no less decisively shaped by Lisztian innovations. The centrepiece of Liu's *Waves* album is the suite of *Miroirs* which helped to bring the composer's name to a much wider audience, not least through the playing of his music by the pianists, friends and fellow composers to whom each individual movement is dedicated.

'Ravel is one of very few composers,' says Liu, 'where you don't have to listen to any other performance. You just look at the score. If you look carefully at each note and each marking, you will grasp what he means. He's also one of very few composers where each sign is actually useful in the sense that it has a completely logical meaning. Of course,' he acknowledges, 'there is always a dilemma for performers: how much of themselves to bring to the music.'

'In general,' he reflects, 'my approach is often quite spontaneous and improvised. Once the notes are under your fingers, it's really about the imagination. And if you have enough imagination, it won't be a very hard job. There are some pieces that no matter which way you play, on another day, you will change your mind, and completely change your approach. I don't think that's the case with Alkan.'

Liu is happy being a pianist of his time – of our time. 'The way we live, the way we look at life, is totally different now. Ravel didn't use an iPad! It's natural for our performances to evolve over time. And I think, if Ravel lived now, he would agree with us.' He is also among the generation of younger performers who have grown up listening to recordings as well as making them, for whom a studio album is a carefully curated production quite separate in style and artistic aims from a live performance.

All images © Christoph Koestlin/DG

'A studio album should not be just a copy of real life,' he says. 'In a studio I don't have the adrenaline or stress of an audience. It's a very calm place – like a little spaceship! It's easier to create a particular sonority in the studio, but harder to create excitement. For example, I've never done so many takes as I did for "Alborada del gracioso" on the new album. It was sounding like I just ate a huge dinner! What the studio allows you to do is play games with sound. There are three kinds of sound for the three composers on the album: Rameau, Alkan and Ravel. You can only do this in a studio environment.'

As Liu notes, pianists of his generation have grown up being able to listen back to themselves. 'The first time Rubinstein heard himself, he was shocked. He couldn't believe he played like that! Pianists of his time found that listening back to themselves put them off. On the other hand, that's what made them distinctive from each other. Nowadays, everything becomes a little bit similar to everything else. Sometimes we lose the human side of art, because mistakes are human. And sometimes it's great to have some mistakes as part of art; then we know that it's not made by a robot. This is the dilemma for performers in the here and now. You can't make mistakes deliberately! But as long as we're aware of the dangers, surely more information and more creativity allow us to use the technology that's available to us.'

## A lifetime ahead

It's a balanced perspective, an even-handed answer to a complex question, which seems typical of Liu as both an artist and a person. He did not grow up, as some pianists do, with a single-minded goal of making music. Just as sitting at the piano kept him quiet for half an hour, a childhood asthma complaint led him to take up swimming. 'It became a habit, and so did piano, and they made a good balance. And swimming is the best sport for musicians: there's almost no danger of muscle damage, and you can relax and train the whole body.'

Other hobbies fell away as piano began taking up more time. 'I don't think I was anything special up to that point. There were teenagers recording Chopin Etudes at 12 or 13; I was nowhere compared to them. But competitions were nice for me because they allowed me to see other people doing the same thing, and to make friends, and also to see how other people play.'

Liu entered a few competitions, and it was the Cooper Competition in Cleveland, where he played with an orchestra for the second time in his life, that made him realise he had a goal. 'It was a shock for me to play with the Cleveland Orchestra: to play with musicians that are so admired, that have made so many famous albums. I realised that I wanted to be a part of that world.'

So here he is, preparing the Scriabin Concerto for the coming season, playing Tchaikovsky (both First and Second Concertos) the world over, living out of a suitcase. Liu is one to count his blessings. 'After a big tour, ten countries in six weeks or something, you hate airports. But after two or three weeks at home, you regenerate. A little bit of rest makes the travelling exciting again. And there's a lifetime of repertoire to explore.' ■

*Bruce Liu's album* Waves *is out on 3 November (DG 4864400). Further details about Bruce Liu, including concert engagements, can be found at www.bruce-liu.com.*

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# LOOPING THE LOOP
# IRONING OUT THE TRICKY PASSAGES

**With a little thought and creativity we can make the learning journey as rewarding as the destination, says Mark Tanner, who shows you how to work on the difficult parts**

There's little doubt that finally playing through a piece at a level we're happy with gives immense satisfaction – the sense of being under control, communicating what we feel the piece is 'about', and at the same time adding something of ourselves. Depending on how long or challenging the piece is, our journey from sight-reading to this final stage may take longer than we'd anticipated, so managing our expectations is something we need to get good at pretty early on. We'd all accept that our performance isn't likely to improve simply by grinding through the piece again and again from beginning to end, so how can we reach our goal more efficiently? The trouble with the phrase 'delayed gratification' is that it seems to imply the process is an irksome but necessary evil, whereas with some thoughtful intuition and imagination we can enjoy the whole learning process as much as the pristine end result.

## Divide and conquer

By breaking the piece down into smaller, more manageable segments and tackling these in a systematic way, our focus immediately sharpens. We are less distracted by other challenging aspects of the piece looming on the horizon and align ourselves with the task at hand. This involves a degree of self-discipline and regular self-appraisal – I've written elsewhere about thinking of every practice session as a self-taught lesson, of course following the guidance of your teacher, if you have one. If the piece presents itself in immediately obvious shorter phrases or sections, then clearly this gives us a starting point for targeted practising. And where these recur within the piece/movement, perhaps with variants, in different keys or building through sequences, we've straight away got the makings of a practice schedule. For example, you could make a feature of a few fast-changing modulations in a sonata's development section, subdividing into smaller chunks as necessary.

### 5 TOP TIPS: Think like an acrobat

1. Isolate tricky corners and look for recurrences/variants of these.
2. Loops could be as short as a couple of chords, or as long as a few lines, but wherever possible choose chunks that focus on one or two specific challenges.
3. Create short practice loops from these chunks, so that you can repeat each one ad libitum (preferably from memory) while hardly skipping a beat.
4. Scan shorter loops from the score onto your digital device, and practice/memorise/analyse to your heart's content.
5. Thread the music back together at a pace that feels comfortable, in any order that feels right; double-check speed relationships to ensure a fluid, even pace and ultra-smooth transitions.

Mark these into your score where appropriate, but guard against caking the pages with elaborate colour systems and codes that could become annoying or distracting. Alternatively, you could scan the more manageable sections onto your digital device, which would also give you valuable points of reference and comparison, so that moments of piano-less work can be done while waiting for the dentist. If you do this, why not scribble a few words as *aides-mémoire* onto each one, to help you jump straight in without feeling you have to split the atom each time.

## Start simple and build

A practice chunk could be literally a few notes or chords, a cross-rhythm lasting one bar, a shift in register that one or both hands are required to make, a few tricky leaps, pair of ornaments, or a brief accompanimental pattern. But it could also be several bars in length, or a few lines of music. These chunks may, if you're lucky, conveniently hook together at some point, to make longer chains that embrace several different challenges – and we'd best not squander time on the straightforward music nearby in these formative stages. I often find the biggest improvements happen when the practice chunks are as short as I can make them, but I also like to intersperse a few minutes practising smaller chunks with more extended ones found elsewhere in the music, partly

to alleviate tension and tunnel-vision, but also to help me feel I've covered more ground.

There's no obligation to work from the beginning of the piece sequentially forwards; in fact I far prefer pinpointing chunks comprised of different complexities and durations that crop up through the entire piece, ensuring the final bars as well as the trickier ones elsewhere are all accounted for. Knowing you can acquit yourself solidly with the main climax of the piece (if it has one) fairly early on in the process, is certainly beneficial psychologically. By reducing the challenges found in a sonata movement into a hierarchy of such chunks, you'll more quickly feel you've got the measure of it: *you have a plan*. Each day, start with these, not necessarily in the same order each time, or with time apportioned similarly, and watch your sense of ownership and control build. A fringe benefit of this approach is that you become better at starting from anywhere within the piece, so that you don't have to backtrack in the event of things going a little awry.

## Repetition

Once you're confident you can move slowly and accurately through each short section, with the hands crisply synchronised and all the machinery well oiled, it's often beneficial to turn these into loops, where possible. By this I mean find ways of linking back to the start of the section, preferably without introducing an awkward or illogical jump on the keyboard. In works from the Classical period especially you'll find these offer themselves up readily. If you can 'fudge' a cadence, so that the final chord/harmony of the chunk in question links plausibly with how it starts, it'll make for smoother repetitions. With a bit of thought, you should even be able to retain the pulse, so that you hardly need to pause between repetitions. Suit yourself in the number of repetitions you opt for – remember, you're not in the gym, so don't get competitive with yourself! The phrase 'no pain, no gain' is quite the opposite of what we're trying to achieve here.

## Context is everything

Ok, so you've been diligently working away at the various chunks – some at a very slow pace, others up to speed, some hands separately, some with no pedal, and others incorporating different rhythms or which are still at a more experimental stage as regards fingerings or pedalling. Naturally, these all need reconnecting and placing back into their proper context in the fullness of time, but there's no hurry to do this. It may well be that some practice loops appear ready to slot back into the all-important musical flow more quickly than others. The whole learning process needs to feel fluid and responsive to how things are developing. Into the bargain, you'll likely learn something about yourself, how you learn best, and how much to expect from yourself at each stage. It's at this point that you will hear a noticeable improvement in your performance of the piece.

An unintended consequence of the approach could be that you find yourself playing sections at different speeds, or with bumpier than ideal transitions; ultimately this is clearly undesirable, but the issue should right itself naturally as you begin to dovetail sections together in pairs or longer sequences with a metronome to hand.

> Done effectively, you may well find that the passages you initially despaired of become the most enjoyable and concrete under your fingers

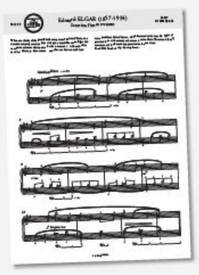
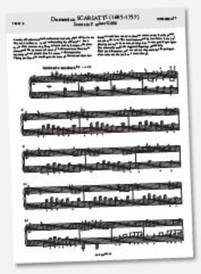
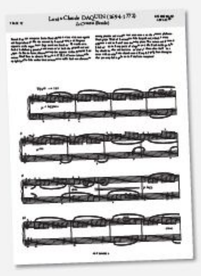
## It's never too late

However close to a performance, exam, audition or other event you find yourself, it's never too late to return to practice loops. In fact, doing this often restores equanimity and reestablishes calmness. Done effectively, you may well find that the passages you initially despaired of become the most enjoyable and concrete under your fingers.

A little-and-often approach usually works best when tackling longer, complex music. Patient, methodical practising utilising practice loops gives us the sense of being masters of our own destiny as we connect better-known to less well known morsels of music. Doing this keeps impetuosity at bay – we actually get there quicker and gain enjoyment in the learning itself. Importantly, this approach isn't about being abstemious or denying yourself – it's about increasing the odds of achieving a more uniformly pleasurable musical experience. Memorising, if that interests you, is certainly helped by building up confidence and accuracy in chunks. Whatever your personal goal, you'll doubtless discover truth in the saying 'a stitch in time saves nine'. ■

*www.marktanner.info*

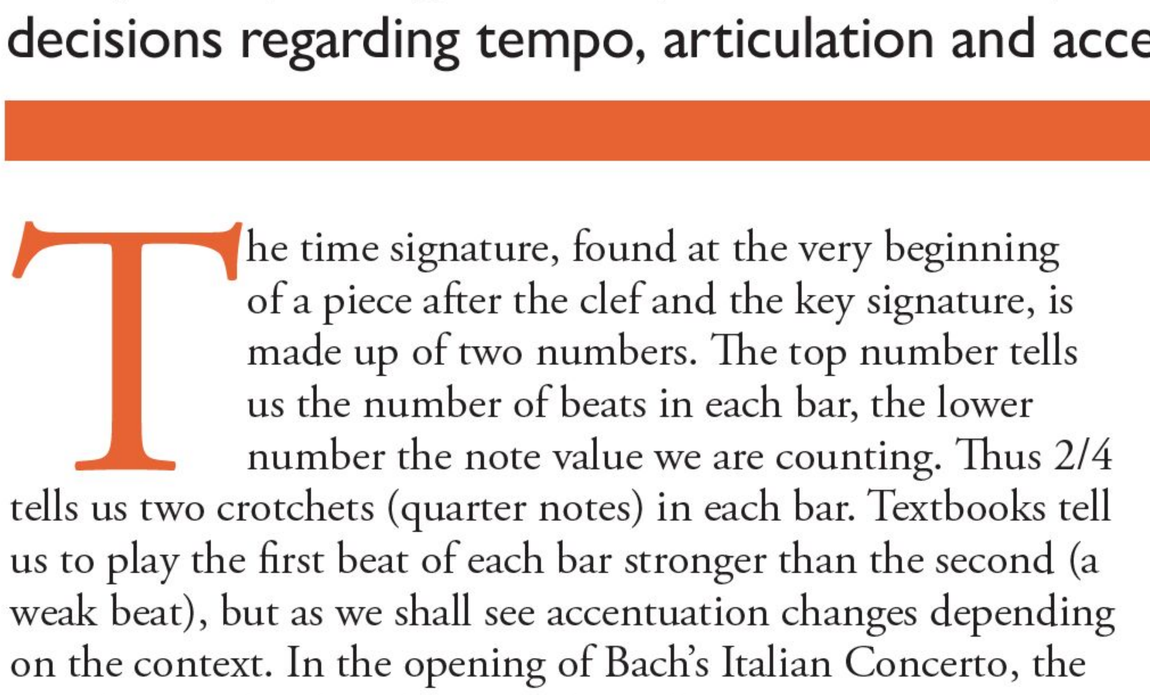
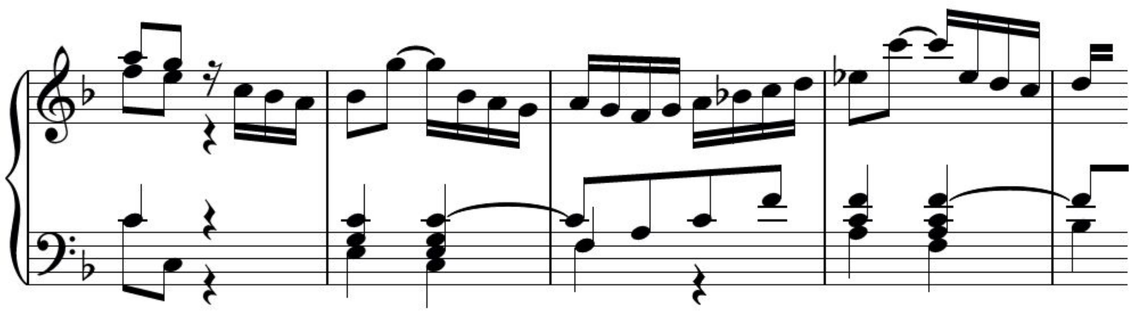
## Complete circle

**Mark Tanner**'s advice for looping the loop in 3 of this issue's scores

**Elgar Sonatine:** Possibilities for creating practice loops abound here. More obvious ones are bars 9-10 and 17-18, each of which would work fine repeated ad libitum, as would the final four bars. Less obvious might be bar 23 going to the first beat of 24, or just the final two bars.

**Scarlatti Sonata K466:** Short loops could help solidify tricky corners here, such as the cross-rhythms from the final beat of bar 5, stopping at the second beat of 6. Bars 16-20 would work nicely when perfecting the LH's rising sequence (or indeed bars 40-44).

**Daquin *Le Coucou*:** Tiny loops could prove ultra useful here, such as bar 4, stopping at beat 1 of bar 5. Or make a 'pair' of loops as you hop (keeping in time) from playing the LH's semiquavers in bar 11 to 23. Now look for awkward transitions/leaps/more extended challenges and enjoy creating your own loops.

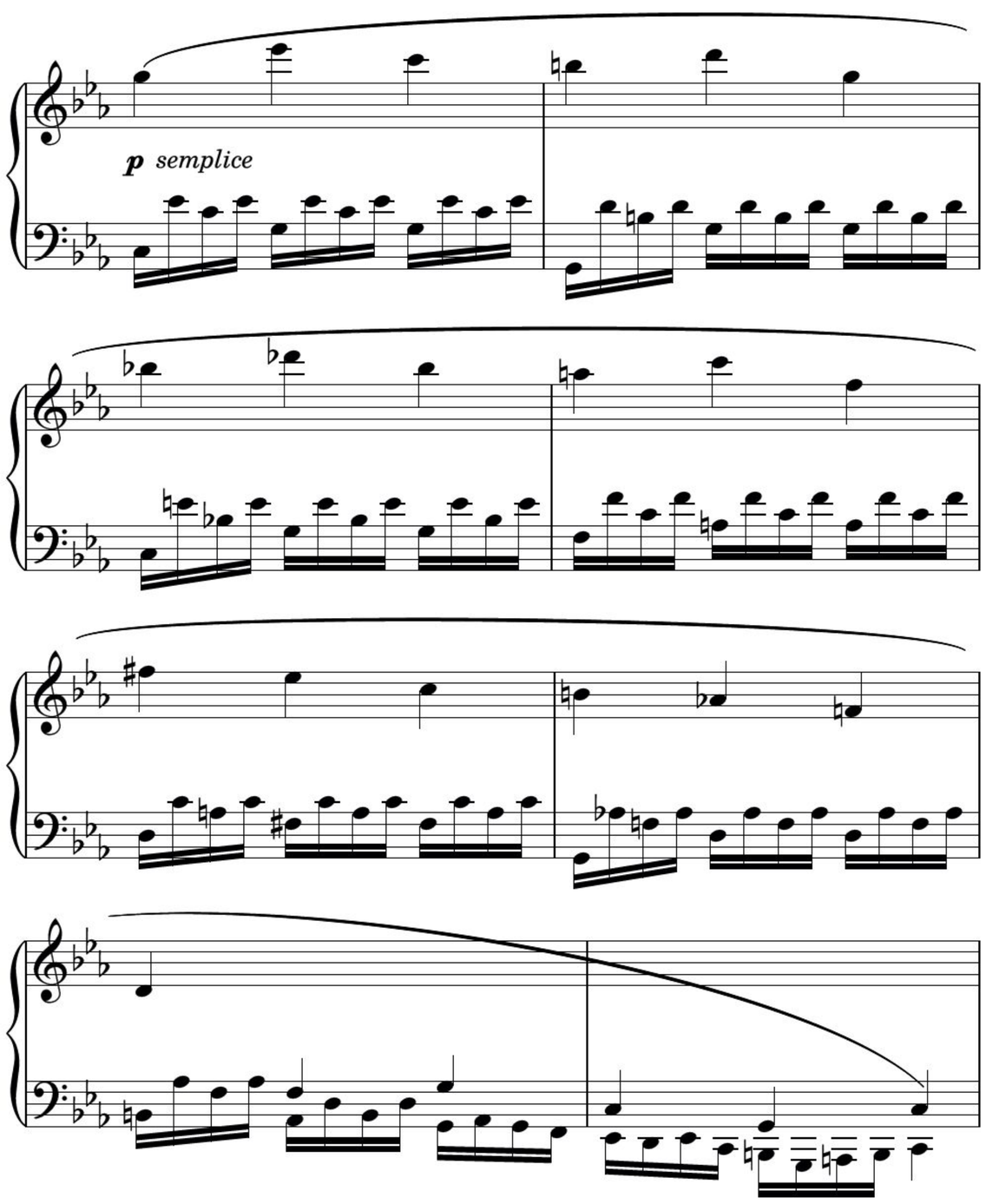
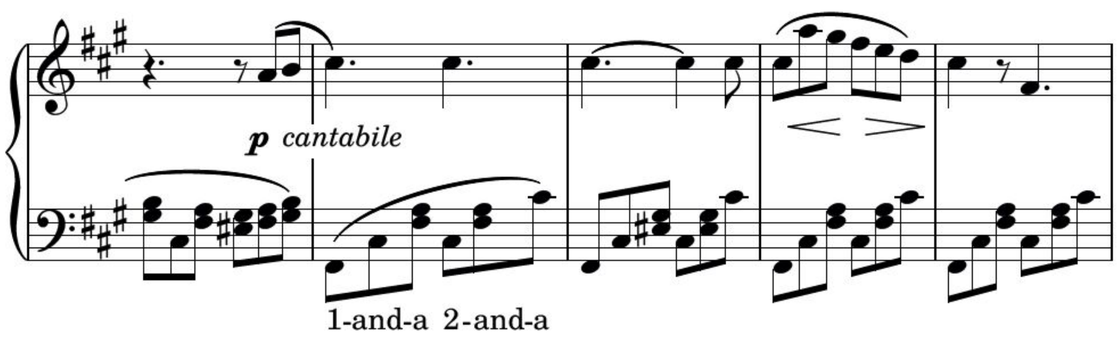
# SIMPLE, DUPLE, ALLA BREVE AND THE REST
# THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF TIME SIGNATURES

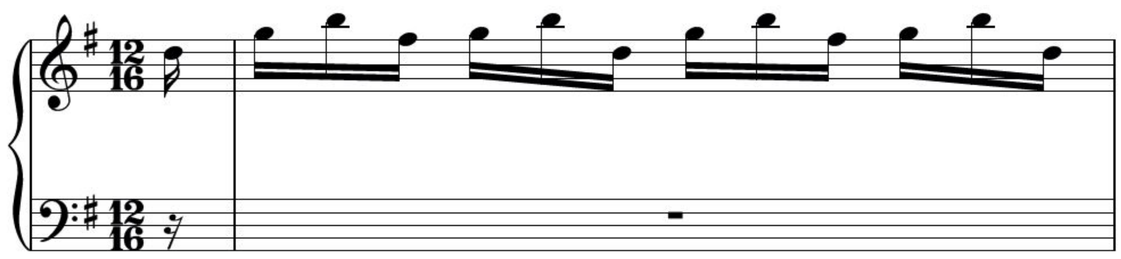
**Graham Fitch** addresses time signatures both simple and tricky – explaining how they can affect our performance decisions regarding tempo, articulation and accentuation

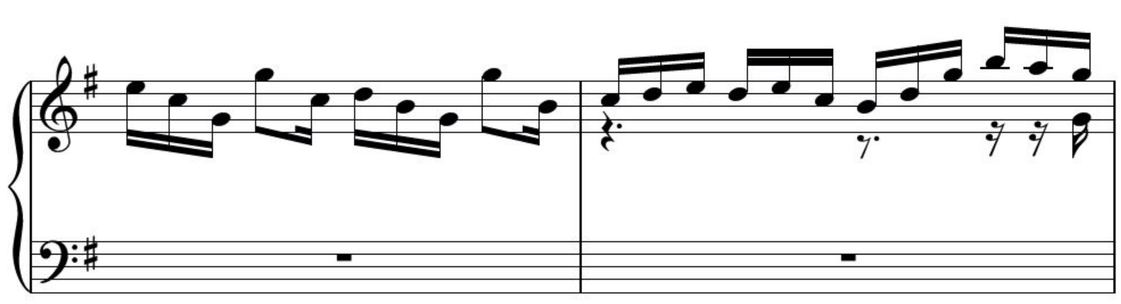
The time signature, found at the very beginning of a piece after the clef and the key signature, is made up of two numbers. The top number tells us the number of beats in each bar, the lower number the note value we are counting. Thus 2/4 tells us two crotchets (quarter notes) in each bar. Textbooks tell us to play the first beat of each bar stronger than the second (a weak beat), but as we shall see accentuation changes depending on the context. In the opening of Bach's Italian Concerto, the chunky LH chords in bars 1 and 5 will create a stronger accent than any other downbeat in both of the opening two four-bar phrases. The accent on the first beat of bar 2 will be lighter, but the second beats of bars 9 and 11 stronger than the first beats, because the syncopations steal the accent (the syncopation in the upper voice in bar 3 similarly throws the stress from the C onto the F).



The are some situations where we aim to fillet the music of its barlines and play as smoothly as possible. The eight-bar phrase marking in the 28th Variation from Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor suggests a long exhalation with minimum interruption to the forward flow of the line. We need not give any first-beat accents to the melodic line – the presence of a new bass note at the start of each bar is enough to show the metrical structure.

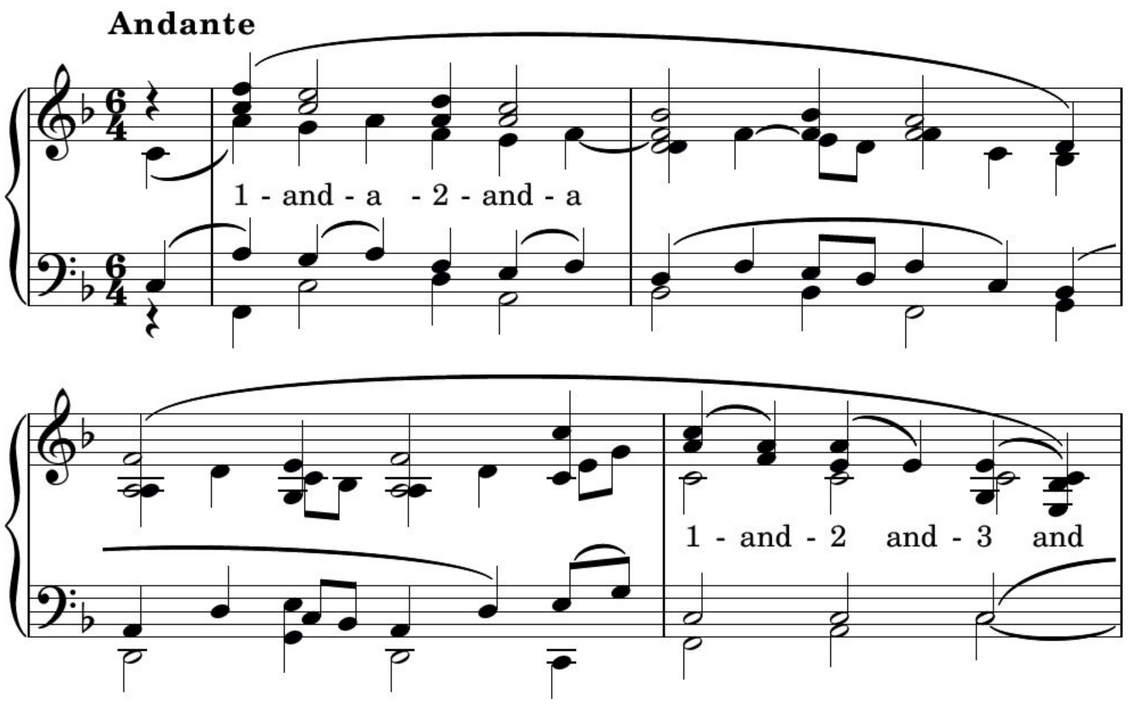
2/4 and 3/4 are examples of simple time, meaning the main beats are subdivided in twos (or multiples thereof). There is another type of time signature, known as compound time, where the main beat is a dotted note subdivided into threes. Divisions of two tend to give a squarer feel to how the music moves, whereas divisions of three a more circular feel. How can

we tell if the music is in simple or compound time from the time signature? If the top number of the time signature is a multiple of 3 (but not 3 itself), the piece is in compound time (3/8 and 3/4 are simple time but 6/4 and 6/8 are compound). You should also be able to see the triple subdivisions of the beats. They are very clear in Mendelssohn's Gondola Song Op 30 No 6, for example. Here, the time signature is 6/8 (compound duple), meaning two dotted crotchets (quarters) per bar; we play with a feeling of two in a bar ('**1**-and-a, **2**-and-a') and not six:

The larger the lower number in a time signature, the lighter the feel; the smaller the lower number, the heavier. Thus, the time signature of 12/16 in the Gigue of Bach's G major French Suite suggests a faster tempo, lighter articulation and a softer dynamic level than had the composer selected 12/8 (both examples of compound quadruple).

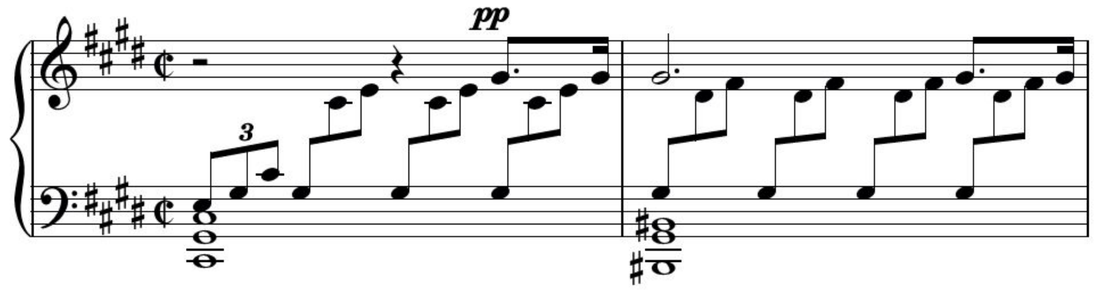


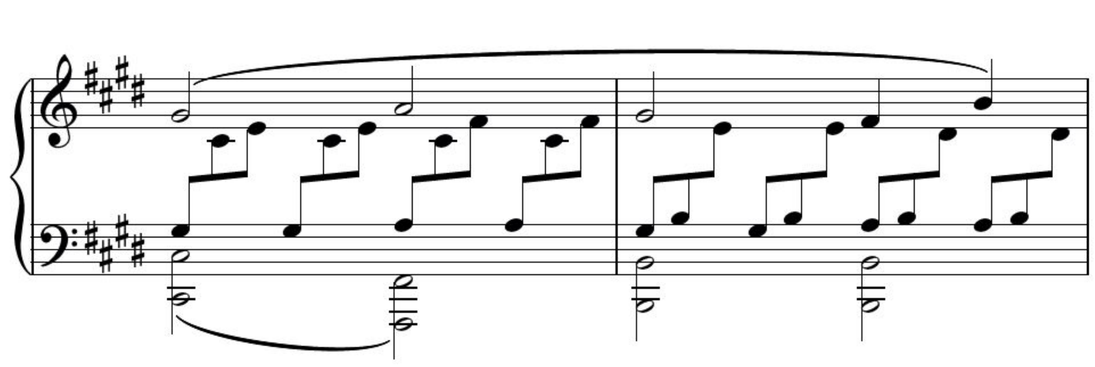


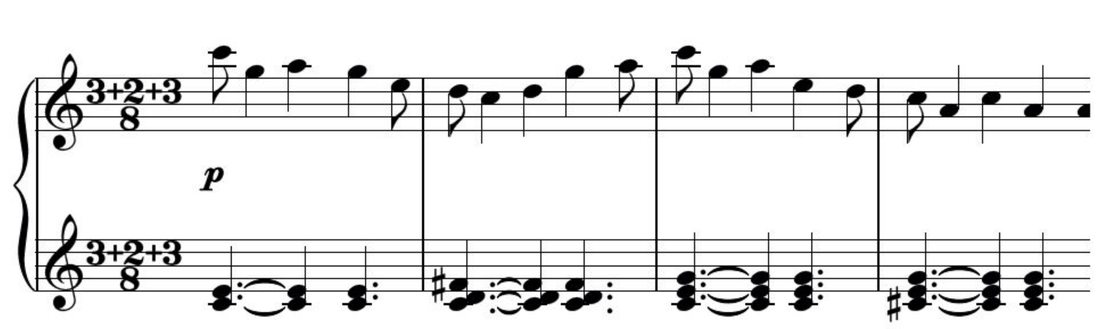
The 6/4 time signature (compound duple) in Brahms' Intermezzo Op 118 No 5 inspires us to play more slowly, weightily and grandly than if he had gone with 6/8 (where we would have found all the note values in the following example doubled). Bar 4 highlights a rhythmic feature used by composers through the ages, an unannounced shift in the

## Divisions of two tend to give a squarer feel to how the music moves, whereas divisions of three a more circular feel

metrics that creates a **hemiola**; here, two groups of three beats are replaced by three groups of two beats, giving the effect of a shift between triple and duple meter. It's up to the player to spot hemiolas when they show up – some are more obvious than others.

A time signature of 2/2, usually indicated by the sign 𝄵 (and often described as *alla breve*) is a simple duple meter with two minims (half notes) per bar. It does not tell us to play twice as fast as if the time signature were 4/4, but with the feeling of two beats in a bar rather than four. This two-in-a-bar feeling produces a more flowing tempo and a more legato articulation – in the first movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata, for example – where players who have not noticed the cut time signature mistakenly apply the *adagio sostenuto* marking to the crotchets rather than to the minims, with the result that the music sounds stodgy and unfeasibly slow.



Some 20th century composers use complex time signatures, such as this example from No 4 of Bartók's *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm*. If you are intimidated by such a time signature, first play a few scales with the irregular grouping '**1**23, **1**2, **1**23', using small accents on each '1'. Once you have the feel for the limping gait these uneven groupings create, you can more easily tackle the piece.

To summarise:
**1** Know whether the piece is in simple or compound time.
**2** If in compound time, count the main (dotted note) beats, not the subdivisions.
**3** The higher the lower number, the faster the tempo and the lighter the touch.
**4** Be clear on the distinction between 4/4 (C) and 2/2 (𝄵)
**5** Do not be a slave to the textbook instruction that all downbeats are accented. Context is everything. ■

*For more on basic theory for the pianist, follow this link to Dave Hall's series on the Online Academy: pianistm.ag/theorycourse.*

## @ GET IN TOUCH

Graham Fitch would like to hear from readers who have piano-playing questions, whether about a certain technique or a passage in a piece of music. Please write to the editor at editor@pianistmagazine.com.
Due to the large number of requests, Graham may not be able to answer every question that is submitted.

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# THE SCORES

Pianist 134 • Read the **lessons** • Play the **scores**

## LESSONS FROM THE **EXPERTS**

**MELANIE SPANSWICK** is a pianist, writer, teacher and composer. As an author, she is published by leading publishing houses, and has written a three-book piano course for those returning to piano playing; *Play It Again: PIANO* (Schott Music). Melanie teaches the piano at Junior Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Eton College. As a composer, her music is published in the renowned Edition Schott Composer Series.
***Read Melanie Spanswick's lesson***

**NILS FRANKE** is Dean of Higher Education at the University Centre Colchester, UK, having previously held posts at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and the University of Reading. He has recorded for Warner and Brilliant Classics. Nils specialises in historical performance pedagogy, with a particular focus on 19th-century pianist-composers. His editions are published by Wiener Urtext and Schott Music International.
***Read Nils Franke's lesson***

**IAGO NÚÑEZ** is a pianist and accomplished musician that has great experience as a soloist, accompanist and teacher. He has written arrangements for a multitude of ensembles as well as editing, filming and producing music. Iago currently teaches music history, analysis, composition and performance at Bishop's Stortford College, UK. He has also been on the jury of various music competitions.
***Read Iago Núñez's lesson***

**CHENYIN LI** is a celebrated concert pianist known for her fiery and intelligent performances of a wide variety of repertoire. Having won multiple international competitions, she has established herself as a versatile player who shines in both solo repertoire as well as concerto. Chenyin has performed in many prestigious venues across the UK, Europe and Asia and her extensive discography includes more than 60 albums for *Pianist*.
***Listen to Chenyin Li on this issue's album***

## SCORES


**24** **KEYBOARD CLASS**
Interchange between the hands

**25** **JC BACH**
March in F BWV ANH 131

**26** **SPANSWICK**
*Gigue*

**27** **GROVLEZ**
Berceuse de la Poupée from
*L'almanach aux images*

**30** **JUON**
*In the cosy corner*

**32** **ELGAR**
Sonatina, first movement

**34** **TELEMANN**
Fugue No 1 in G minor TWV 30:21-26

**36** **REGER**
*Humoreske*, No 2 from
12 Klavierstücke

**40** **SCARLATTI**
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**44** **CLARA SCHUMANN ARR. LISZT**
*Geheimes Flüstern hier und dort*

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*Romance* Op 44 No 1

**53** **DAQUIN**
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**59** **FALLA**
*Ritual Fire Dance*


*Music typeset by Beautiful Setting*

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**ABILITY RATING** LATE BEGINNER

# PAUL JUON
## IN THE COSY CORNER OP 91 NO 1

This quirky little piece, penned by a relatively unknown Swiss Romantic composer, will benefit from subtle phrasing and attention to dynamics, advises **Melanie Spanswick**

**Key** A minor **Tempo** Andantino **Style** Late Romantic
**Will improve your** ✓ Articulation ✓ Rhythmic precision ✓ Phrasing

*In the Cosy Corner* (in German, *Im Schmollwinkel*) was written in 1933 by Russian-born Swiss composer Paul Juon (1872-1940). Juon studied composition at the Moscow Conservatoire with Anton Arensky and Sergei Taneyev and completed his education at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, where he became professor of composition from 1911-1934. Stylistically, his music is rooted in tonality exhibiting largely Germanic Romantic gestures. This is the first from a set of six pieces for children called *Easy Piano Pieces For Youth.*

*In The Cosy Corner* is an example of Ternary (ABA) form. In terms of tempo, it moves along nicely at a crotchet equals 69 beats per minute, but the final nine bars, which resemble a Coda, must slow down considerably, as the *piu lento* suggests.

The work is constructed in four-bar phrases. However, the shorter phrases must be noted: In the first bar of the RH part, the first three notes (E, G, F) are phrased together and therefore must be played smoothly, but the final note of this group (the F), can be lifted in preparation for the next note, also an F, which contains a staccato marking. This pattern runs throughout the piece and each final staccato quaver of the four-note pattern should ideally be played lightly and gracefully – in keeping with the Late Romantic style – as opposed to a very short and sharp articulation.



SEE SCORES SECTION

### LEARNING TIP

Use the sustaining pedal liberally throughout!

Balance of sound between the hands is important. To project the melody effectively, the RH part requires a deeper touch whilst the LH accompaniment can be lighter. On the second beat of bar 2, the RH should be played elegantly with an expressive spread chord followed by a fairly quick release in order to observe the subsequent quaver rest; here it is important to release the sustaining pedal to allow for a short breathing space between each phrase. Where longer phrases are marked, such as at bar 25, smooth, legato contoured lines will help capture the gentle character.

The LH part is equally as important. To learn it fluently, try chunking or 'blocking-out' bars which are built from chords – for example, bars 1-5 and bars 9-13. Once the notes in each bar have been learned as chords, play them as written but be sure to hold the minim notes at the bottom of the texture until the end of the bar. This note pattern occurs on numerous occasions, for example, in bars 1, 3, and 5. The sustaining pedal will help create resonance here, as well. It's also worth observing the LH chords between bars 17-25: the tenuto markings will require a deeper touch – because the chords act as a strong support to the RH's meandering tune – before the opening theme returns at bar 29.

Rhythmic precision is paramount. When working on the opening phrase, count in semiquavers so that you are able to precisely 'place' the RH semiquaver G between the LH quavers A and C. Sub-dividing the beat into semiquavers will also be useful for passages such as those in the RH at bar 6, 14, 18, 19, and 22-25. Using a metronome might be beneficial until the pulse and rhythmic pattern has been grasped securely, after which you can relax the tempo and employ subtle rubato at the end of each eight-bar phrase, and especially at bar 28.

Observe the dynamic indications. Whilst the first four bars are to be played softly, the music moves to a strident *forte* at bar 5, followed by a diminuendo. This dynamic pattern is repeated in the following eight-bar passage. A full *forte* should be implemented at bar 24, and be sure to note the highlighted *mezzo forte* at bar 35. Keep the last seven bars soft and light, but with a particular emphasis on the semitone oscillation between C♯ to C natural in the LH chords. The final A minor chord should sound like it is gracefully drifting off into the distance. ■

*www.melaniespanswick.com*

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**ABILITY RATING** INTERMEDIATE

# ELGAR
## SONATINA
## FIRST (AND SECOND) MOVEMENT

A gem of a piece that deserves to be studied and performed more often, says **Nils Franke**

**Key** G major **Tempo** Andantino **Style** Romantic
**Will improve your** ✓ Expressive skills ✓ Pedalling ✓ Handling of texture

Edward Elgar (1857-1934) is not a composer generally known as a writer of piano music. Nevertheless, his own piano solo transcription of the *Enigma Variations* is testimony to an insightful and effective use of the instrument. Never showy, just purposeful and imaginative. It's no surprise, then, that this little two-movement Sonatina displays similar qualities. Note: the second movement appears inside the next issue, but I thought it logical to include some playing tips here.

First written in 1889 for his niece, Elgar produced a revision of the work as we now know it in 1931. That is significant, because there must have been something about the piece that Elgar as a mature composer valued and was happy to put his name to for publication. The first movement is about Grade 3 in standard, whereas the second movement requires Grade 5-6 pianism, depending on the tempo. I think that the first movement in particular makes a beautiful stand-alone piece in performance.

First movement: Before practising in detail, highlight some of the musical features, because the primary challenges are expressive, rather than questions of dexterity. Right from the start (bars 1-4), the melody and accompaniment lines have distinct qualities of their own, as well as working together effectively. That makes separate hand practice both a pleasure and a necessity: a necessity so that the player learns to appreciate and listen to each line, and a pleasure because there are so many details to discover. For example, in bars 9-12 Elgar builds a crescendo that culminates in the *f* of bar 13 through the increased sonority three-part writing.

He returns to the idea of three parts in bars 25-28, but this time using three different textures, which all need to be audible as such: a legato top line, a held middle voice, and a staccato bass line. To do justice to such a busy few bars requires good control of different forms of articulation, which could just as well have been written for a string or woodwind trio.

Bars 33 to 36 again culminate in bar 37, but unlike bars 9-12 are not marked as crescendo, so the *f* in bar 37 should be more of a surprise.

A word about the pedalling: Elgar chose not to introduce pedal markings – I have added my own, as a guide. There are plenty of places where the composer notated rests in the LH, juxtaposing it with legato lines in the RH. Hence, my pedalling encourages this contrast to be heard!




SEE SCORES SECTION

Second movement (issue 135): At first glance, the technical patterns used in this movement look a bit like the educational pieces by Gretchaninov or Kabalevsky, yet melodically and harmonically there are many moments that sound very much like Elgar! The result is that the piece has more the character of an etude than the first movement, as well as the associated technical benefits of a work focused on promoting dexterity.

For example, the semiquavers in bars 1-3, 37-40 and 75-80 need careful coordination and a sharp differentiation between legato and staccato where it occurs. Note the fingering for the semiquaver passages, because it determines a sequence of hand positions that is essential to the smooth playing of the semiquavers. The notion of dynamic contrasts is a key ingredient of the piece, because Elgar offsets the *f* chords in bars 17-18 with the *p* textures in bar 18.

Bars 65-74 should broadly maintain the tempo of the movement, as only bars 73-74 are specifically marked *rit*. Just as the first movement lends itself to be played as a stand-alone piece, so does the second, but arguably for different reasons. Whereas the first movement is musically self-contained in the number of interconnected musical ideas, it is the element of contrast and use of new material that carries the second movement in practice and performance. ■

*www.nils-franke.com*

### LEARNING TIP

Bring out the contrast between the smooth legato lines and the 'breathing' rests – the pedal indications will help.

HOW TO PLAY

**ABILITY RATING** ADVANCED

# MANUEL DE FALLA
# RITUAL FIRE DANCE

Good news! This bewitching dance is easier than it sounds, says **Iago Núñez** – just don't forget to having your oscillating in order

Spanish piano repertoire has often been perceived as the exclusive domain of musicians born in the Iberian Peninsula, with interpreters such as Alicia de Larrocha and Rafael Orozco promoting Granados, Albéniz and the likes by regularly featuring them in their programmes. However, it was none other than the celebrated Polish pianist Arthur Rubinstein who was the great champion of Manuel de Falla's own piano transcription of the *Danza Ritual del Fuego* (Ritual Fire Dance) from his ballet *El Amor Brujo* (Love, the Magician). For years Rubinstein would include it as one of his encore pieces, and despite the fabulous amount of repertoire that he kept under his fingers, this dance used to be a favourite vehicle for ending a recital. It is easy to see why, as the combination of seductive melodies, powerful rhythmic ideas, great opportunities for colour and sound effects, and a thrilling final coda would often result in an outstanding ovation. Falla

'The main preoccupation for the interpreter should be focused on trying to replicate the orchestral sounds and textures'

was very grateful to Rubinstein and dedicated his greatest solo piano composition *Fantasía Bética* to him, perhaps hoping that this too will be regularly performed. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and shortly after the premiere Rubinstein quickly abandoned it, preferring the more impactful character of the *Ritual Fire Dance*.

## *That* famous opening

Fortunately for the pianist, this piece decisively falls under the category of repertoire that sounds much harder than it really is. Although there are some technical challenges, getting around the notes should not be too complicated. The main preoccupation for the interpreter should be focused on trying to replicate the orchestral sounds and textures, and to negotiate one or two awkward corners that derive from the fact that this score is clearly a transcription and not an original work for piano.

The first of these challenges comes in the form of the opening trill, which in the original orchestral version is scored for violas and clarinets. For a crisper first note it can be quite effective to play the first E that is written as an acciaccatura with the LH, and the next E with the RH. This will allow for a powerful opening that can be enhanced by dramatically moving your LH out of the way to add a sense of visual drama. The next musical direction can be hard to recreate on the piano, as it is challenging to quickly reduce the dynamics from *forte* to *pianissimo* within one bar. One useful trick here is not to start the trill too soon after striking the first two notes, but rather to let the sound die down a little before trilling. Use your ears carefully as the amount of time will greatly depend on the natural resonance of the piano and the acoustics of your venue.

For a more effective and fast-sounding passage, keep your fingers very close to the keys whilst playing the trill and try not to break contact with the surface. In order to achieve a successful crescendo and diminuendo over the first eight bars, try alternating fingerings: start with 2-3 and move to 1-3 in the middle. This will give you more volume as you progress through the crescendo. Changing fingerings will also help

to keep a relaxed wrist as there is quite a bit more trilling to be done throughout the piece. For the ultimate crescendo try introducing the LH to play the E and the RH to play the F. Keeping the sustain pedal firmly down whilst alternating hands will create the most phenomenal amount of sound in this register of the piano, and if the transition is done smoothly it will generate an impressive wave of sound.

Once the trill starts oscillating between the E and the F from bar 9, there are a couple of considerations to have in order to perform this successfully. When listening to the orchestral version, the grace notes that precede every trill are played by various instruments that cut across the constant oscillation in the strings. One option for us pianists is to take those two notes with the LH whilst trilling with the RH. The main disadvantage here comes later on, when the LH has to play the bass line in bar 17 and this solution is no longer viable. It is therefore a personal choice to either create a consistent sound from bars 9-23 if the music is played just by the RH, or to have a bit of difference if the LH helps out for the first few bars of the passage. It is great fun experimenting with all of these arrangements, hand distributions and fingerings, and it will make your practice a lot more enjoyable and creative. [Watch Iago's performance at www.pianistmagazine.com/lessons.]

In an act of extraordinary pianistic skill, Alicia de Larrocha is able to continuously play the trill past bar 24 whilst introducing the melody and maintaining the bass line. I can only assume that in this instance she makes use of a mysterious third hand to assist her with this keyboard wizardry!

## Feel the heat

Like many examples of Spanish music, the melody needs to continue the rhythmic drive of the bass ostinato, so, do not be afraid to use plenty of strong accents to punctuate the strong parts of the bar. Emphasising the first note of the triplets in bars 25-26 will help to create an effect of heavy stomping. At this point in the story of the ballet, the protagonist Candela is dancing around the fire at midnight in order to summon up the bad spirit from the underworld. Try to conjure up the image of a gypsy dancer passionately twirling and shaking with abandon as she is in a state of near possession. This is not a piece for subtle musical gestures, so be brave and bold with your musical decisions.

The LH should help you retain a sense of drive and tension whilst the RH explores the melodic flourishes typical of the flamenco singing style known as 'Cante jondo'. Try to drive the music towards every second bar and accentuate the cluster of notes that happen in the LH, such as the first beats of bars 24, 26 and 28. In bar 41, where the melody is briefly played in octaves, it can be quite challenging to play the triplet with the same rhythm precision than in previous phrases. Make sure that the thumb is quickly retracted once the octave is played so as to allow the wrist to rotate and reach the remaining notes on the triplet. Practise this by playing the thumb D♭ staccato whilst the top line remains legato. With a touch of pedal at the start of the bar, the lower note will not be perceived to be any shorter and the passage will be easier to play.

Once again you will need a very nimble thumb to play the descending semiquaver arpeggios in bars 54, 56 and 58. The hand needs to be quite open to tackle the large distance between the F and B♭, but also move freely and quickly into the next position in the arpeggio sequence. The thumb is key to unlocking this passage and your hand should be opening and closing quickly, much like the fan of any Spanish lady in the sweltering heat of Andalusia, who can extend and retract said implement with the flick of the wrist.

## Flying high

In the next musical episode starting at bar 67, you can try to channel your inner Rubinstein by throwing your hands high up in the air after each alternating chord for a full dramatic effect. Alternatively, if you are preoccupied with accuracy, you might prefer to stay closer to the ivories. In any case, the appearance of the melody at bar 75 should imitate a large orchestral sound. Rather than a sharp attack with the little finger, try to distribute the arm weight to the top of the hand for a fuller and richer sound. Use the *una corda* pedal at bar 83 for tonal contrast – and if you feel brave enough and can master a subtle half pedal, you can keep the sustain pedal on for five or six bars to produce an esoteric sound to match the magic programmatic ideas of the piece.

Throughout the composition it is important to remember that we are dealing with a transcription and therefore we don't need to treat the musical notation with the same reverence and respect as if approaching a Beethoven sonata. If taking out a note here and there in the awkward chords in the middle section will help you to play the melody more effectively, then don't feel too guilty about it. Equally, you can embellish the writing if you have any tasteful ideas that can help the music become more exciting. I count myself among many pianists who, instead of playing the final ascending RH scales in the coda (bars 158, 162, 164, 168), prefer to add a fast glissando starting on the note next to the LH and culminating on the explosive E chords. [For guidance, watch Iago's performance.]

It might be tempting to rush through the final set of repeated chords to give a sense of excitement but strive to keep them precisely in time. The final tempo marking, *Più mosso, ma giusto*, should be carefully observed. Remember that this music is to be danced to and this zapateado (the Spanish word for 'stomping' and an important element in flamenco dancing) needs to be precisely played. Once you have reached your desired tempo in the preceding *Poco a poco affrettando*, stay with it firmly until the end.

If you enjoyed playing this, I can highly recommend two other dances from Falla's celebrated ballet, *The Three Cornered Hat*. Both 'Danza del Molinero' and 'Danza de la Molinera' are wonderful to play and if you want a bigger challenge, his Four Spanish Pieces are all incredible gems worth exploring. ■

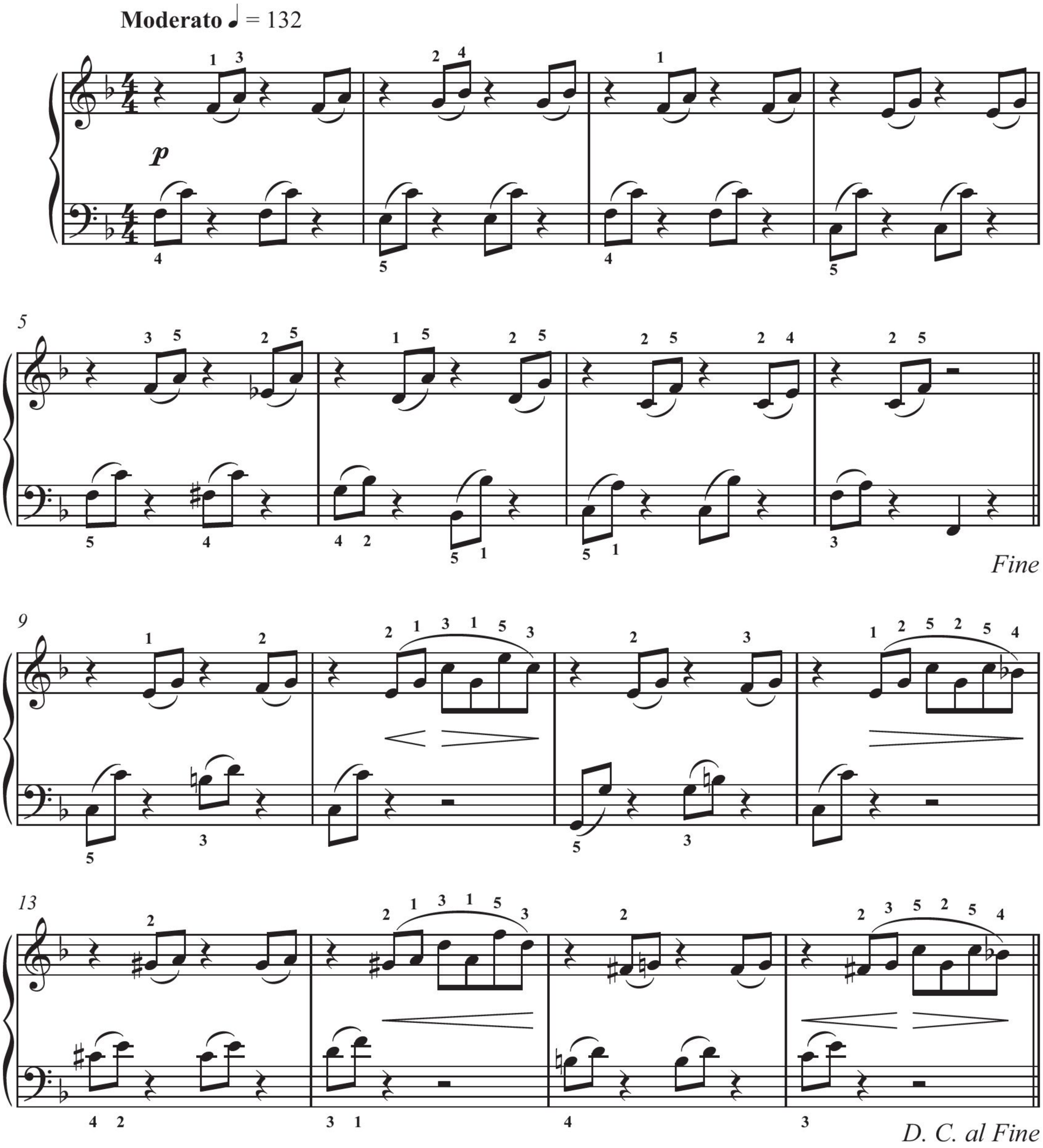
*Iago Núñez performs* Ritual Fire Dance *on this issue's album. Watch his performance and a video lesson on the piece at www.pianistmagazine.com/lessons.*

# HANS-GÜNTER HEUMANN
# BEGINNERS KEYBOARD CLASS

## LESSON 60: INTERCHANGE BETWEEN THE HANDS

On these pages, *Pianist* covers the most basic stages of learning through a series of lessons by Hans-Günter Heumann. German composer Cornelius Gurlitt's one-page study focuses on the interchange of notes between the hands.

### Gurlitt Study Op 187 No 54

The passing of notes from one hand to the other should 'sound' seamless. Try to find the exact same weight and tone for the notes, with a slight emphasis on the first beat of the bar.

Hans-Günter Heumann continues his series for beginners in the next issue.
To find out more about Heumann, visit www.schott-music.com

TRACK 1

# Johann Christian BACH (1735-1782)
## March in F major BWV Anh 131

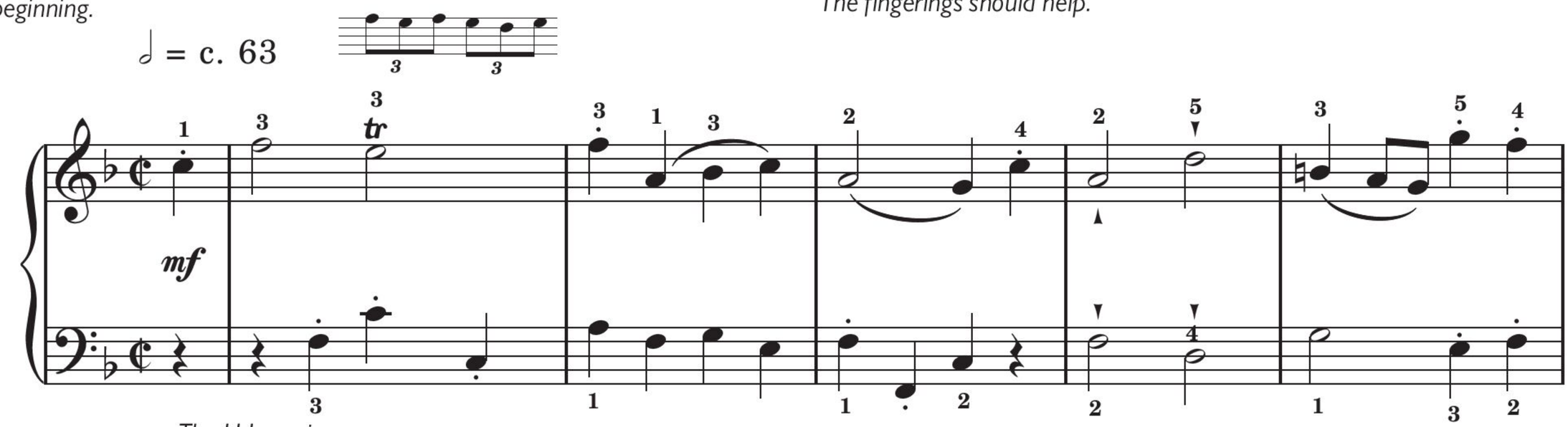
BEGINNER

This spirited piece comes from JS Bach's *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach* – a set of two volumes of works that he presented to his second wife, Anna Magdalena. Keyboard music (minuets, rondos, polonaises, chorales, sonatas, preludes, musettes, marches, gavottes) makes up most of both notebooks, and a few pieces for voice (songs and arias) are included. The two notebooks are known by their title page dates of 1722 and 1725. The title 'Anna Magdalena Notebook' is commonly used to refer to the latter. The primary difference between the two collections is that the 1722 notebook contains works only by JS Bach (including most of the French Suites), while the 1725 notebook is a compilation of music by both JS Bach and other composers of the era, including sons JC and CPE. This is a great little warm-up and/or sight-reading piece for those of a more advanced level. Pedal is not required.
**Look at the technical tips within the score.**

*The key is F major, with the one B flat in the key signature.*

*Count the pulse out loud for a few bars before beginning.*

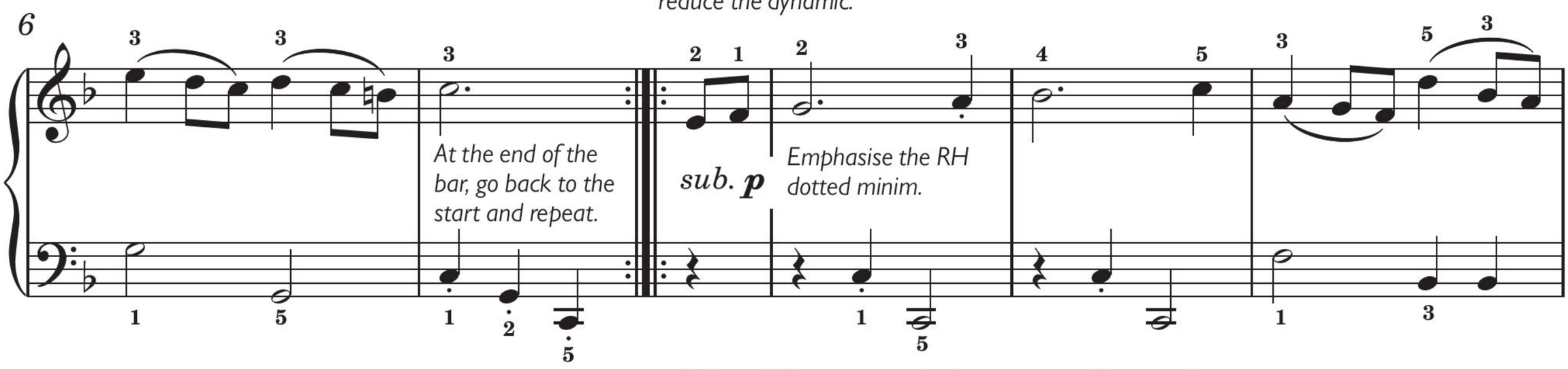
*In order to help the player, the trill is written out in full. Listen to the track for further help. Early beginners do not need to play the trill.*

*Notice all the different articulations, which sometimes all appear within one bar (accents, slurs, staccatos). The piece needs careful, slow, hands-separate practice. The fingerings should help.*

*The LH requires a strong, steady pulse.*

*Observe all LH crotchet rests, lifting the hands away from the keys.*

*The word 'subito' ('sub.' for short), means 'suddenly'. Hence, the score requires the player to suddenly reduce the dynamic.*

*Work on the two slurred phrasings in this bar below.*




*At the end of the bar, go back to the start and repeat.*

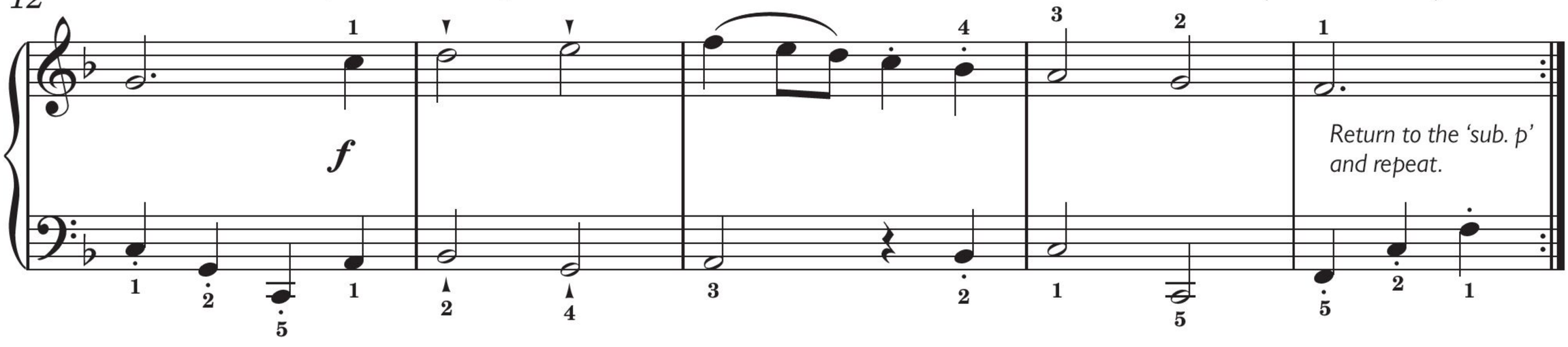
*Emphasise the RH dotted minim.*

*Make a slight accent on the bottom LH minim, as if 'falling' onto it from the previous dotted-crotchet note.*

*Same again.*

*Now increase the dynamic to a strong forte – maintaining this to the end.*

*Keep the dotted minim held for the duration of the bar.*



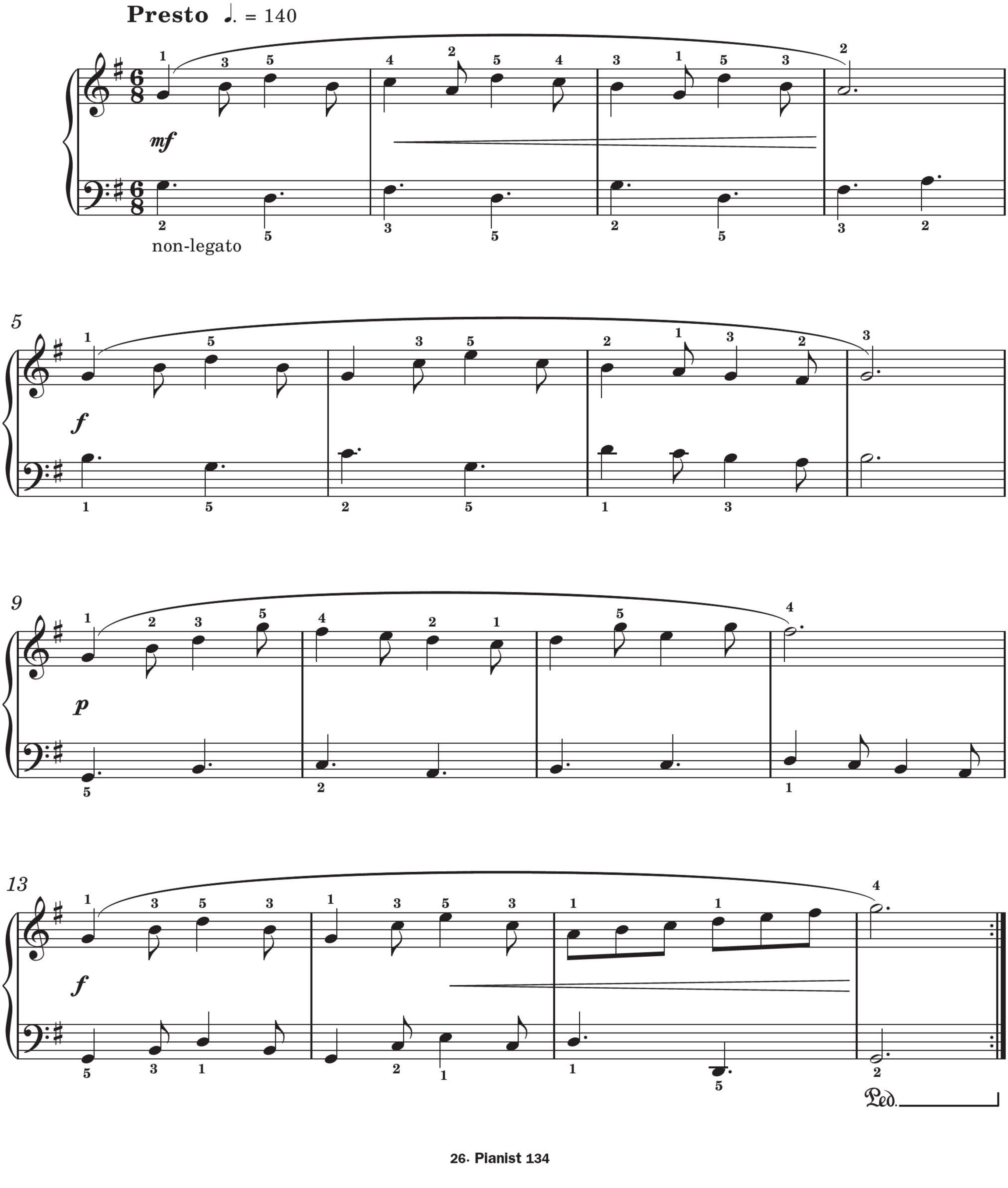

*Return to the 'sub. p' and repeat.*

TRACK 2

# Melanie SPANSWICK

## *Gigue*

BEGINNER

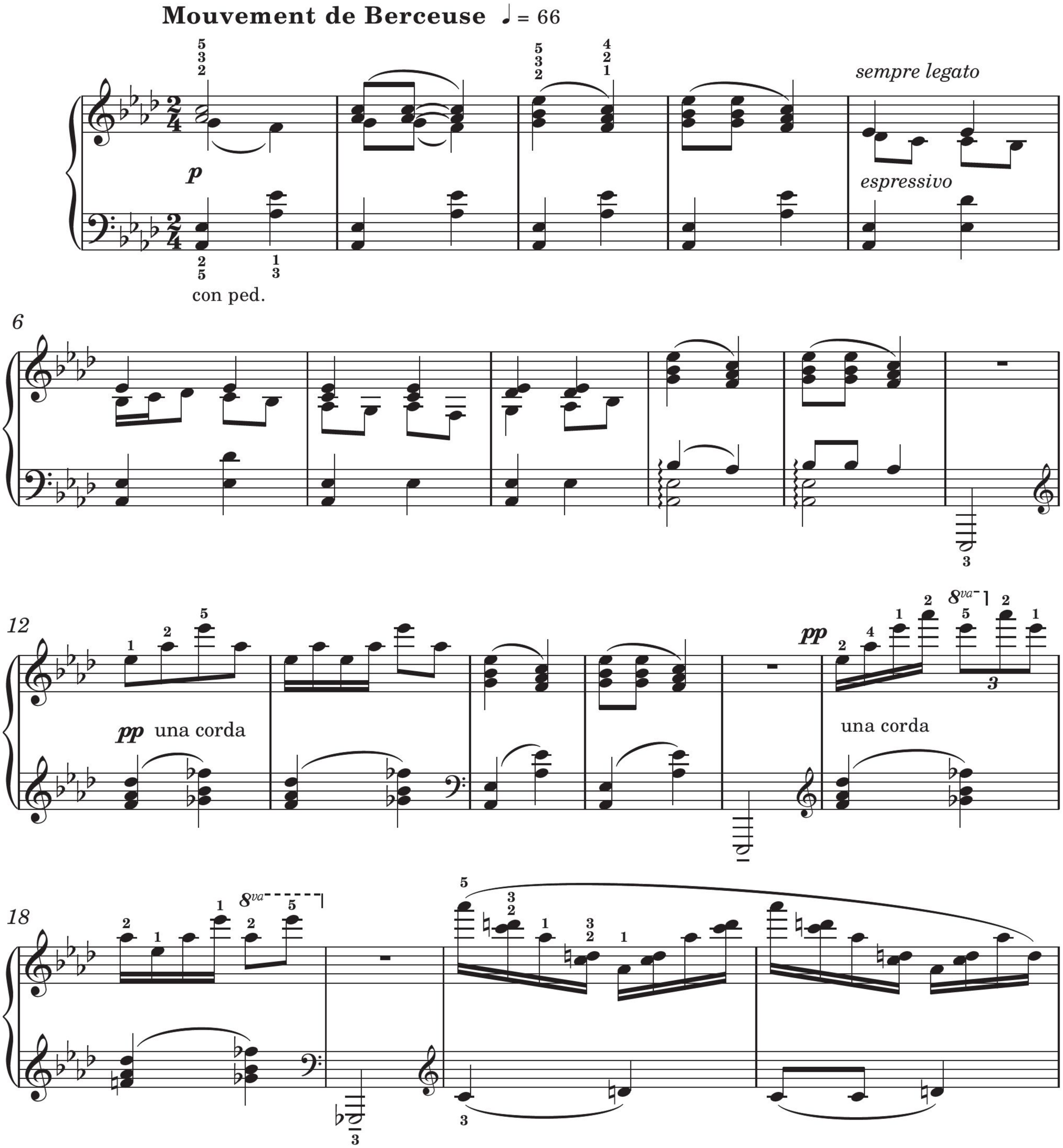
*Notes from the composer*: A gigue is a fast dance usually in binary form, featuring a compound time signature. The dance originated in the UK and was especially popular in Ireland (called the 'Jig'), before becoming known in France from the 1650s. A favourite musical form among Baroque composers, the gigue typically appears as the last movement in a suite. In the key of G major, this lively dance requires deft fingerwork and a firm sense of pulse. Start out by tapping the rhythm on your piano lid or on your knees – with the RH tapping the note patterns in the treble line and the LH tapping those in the bass line. In the early stages, it may help to use the metronome. Now add the notes to that rhythm, articulating a firmer beat on each crotchet in the melodic line, and a lighter touch on the quavers. The LH dotted crotchets should ideally be played non legato, or slightly detached, throughout. The RH will be effective with a smooth legato touch and be sure to colour each four-bar phrase with a varied tonal range. The last two bars demand a fulsome crescendo.

TRACK 3

# Gabriel GROVLEZ (1879-1944)
## Berceuse de la Poupée from *L'almanach aux images*

INTERMEDIATE

This 'doll's lullaby' is the second movement from Gabriel Grovlez's cycle *L'almanach aux images*, which draws its imagery from texts by Tristan Klingsor (who also supplied Ravel with several poems for Impressionist and Orientalist song cycles such as *Shéhérazade)*. The third movement, 'La Sarabande' appeared inside issue 100 and the eighth and final movement, 'Petites litanies de Jésus', inside issue 111.

*Playing tips*: Serene and rocking, make sure that you create a calm and even pace before you begin. Bring out the inner RH alto melody between bars 6-9 (and again at bars 56-59). The one bass minim note – such as in bars 11 and 19 – doesn't need to be perfectly on time; it can linger a bit. From bar 17 you will need your best *pianissimo* – the RH arpeggios literally floating over the keys. The climax appears between bars 34-38, followed by an expressive transition taking us back to the opening material at bar 52. An improvisatory-style coda appears at bar 62 and then the music dies away, evaporating into thin air.

*Pedal tips*: As a general guideline, we suggest one pedal change per bar, though not always engaging the full depth of the pedal; half depth or three quarters depth may be stylistically more suitable.

22

27

cresc.

31

*f*

35

*sempre legato*

*dim.*

40

rall.

a tempo

*ppp les deux pédales*

45

*mf*

*espressivo*

50

*p*

56

*sempre legato*

*espressivo*

62

***ppp*** *trés lointain*

una corda

68

***pp*** *una corda*

*dim.*

***pppp***

TRACK 4

DON'T MISS MELANIE SPANSWICK'S **LESSON** ON THIS PIECE

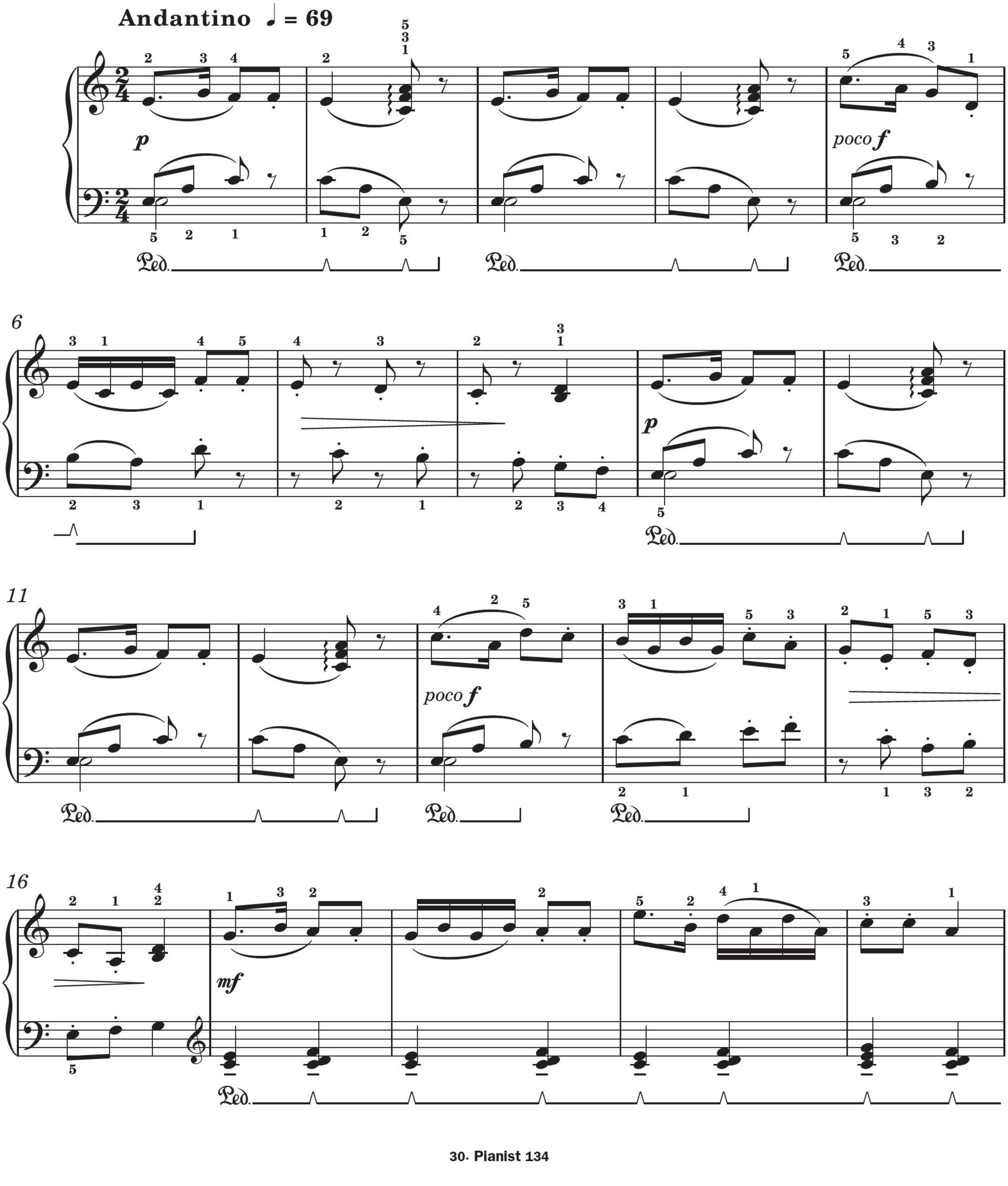
# Paul JUON (1872-1940)

## *In the cosy corner*

BEGINNER/ INTERMEDIATE

The son of a Swiss émigré, Paul Juon was born in Moscow and entered the Imperial Conservatory to study violin and composition. For the latter, he studied with Arensky and Taneyev, both of whose styles had been strongly influenced by Tchaikovsky. He went on to study at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin with Woldemar Bargiel, Clara Schumann's half-brother, providing Juon with a direct link to the German Romantic style of Mendelssohn and Schumann. Juon settled in Berlin in 1897, later taking up a teaching post at the Hochschule.

In 1934, ill health led him to retire to Vevey in Switzerland. While the influences of Tchaikovsky and Taneyev come through in his music, Juon's compositional voice is largely Germanic – he has even been called the 'Russian Brahms'. Much of his later music is full of the sound of Scandinavia, perhaps partly due to his experience arranging Sibelius's works for his German publisher. This catchy little piece is the first from his Six Easy Piano Pieces for the Young Op 91.

**Read Melanie Spanswick's step-by-step lesson.**

21

25

*f*

*p*

Ped.

30

Ped.

Ped.

35

poco rit.

più lento

*mf*

*pp*

Ped.

Ped.

39

rit.

Ped.

TRACK 5

DON'T MISS NILS FRANKE'S **LESSON** ON THIS PIECE

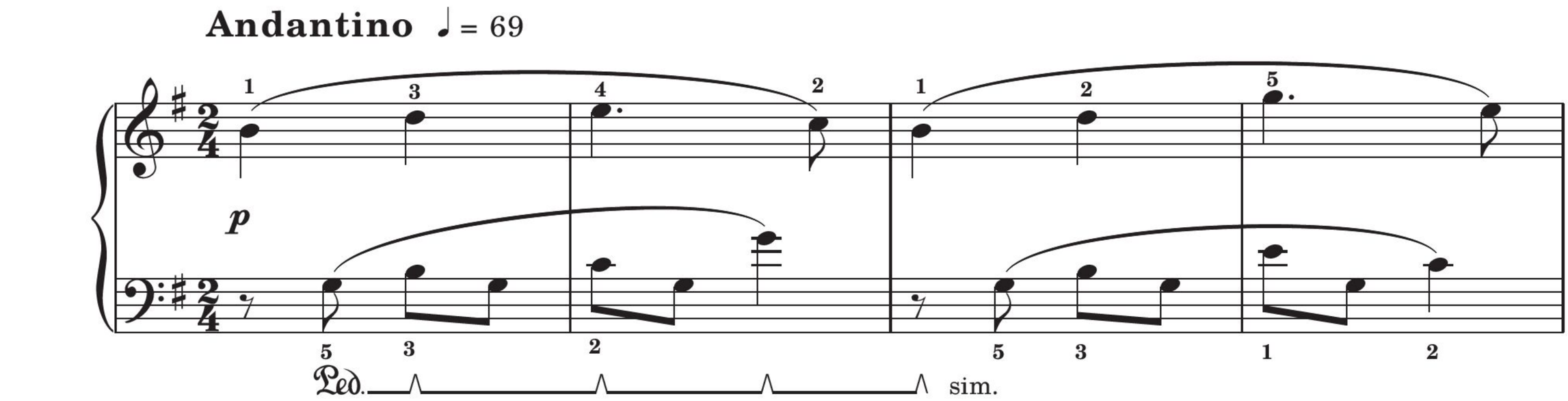
# Edward ELGAR (1857-1934)

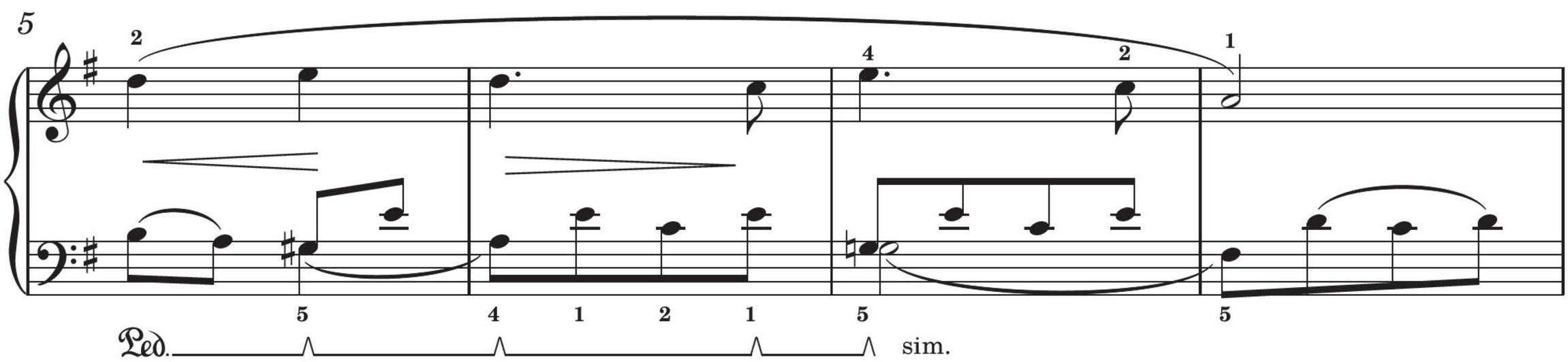
## Sonatina, first movement

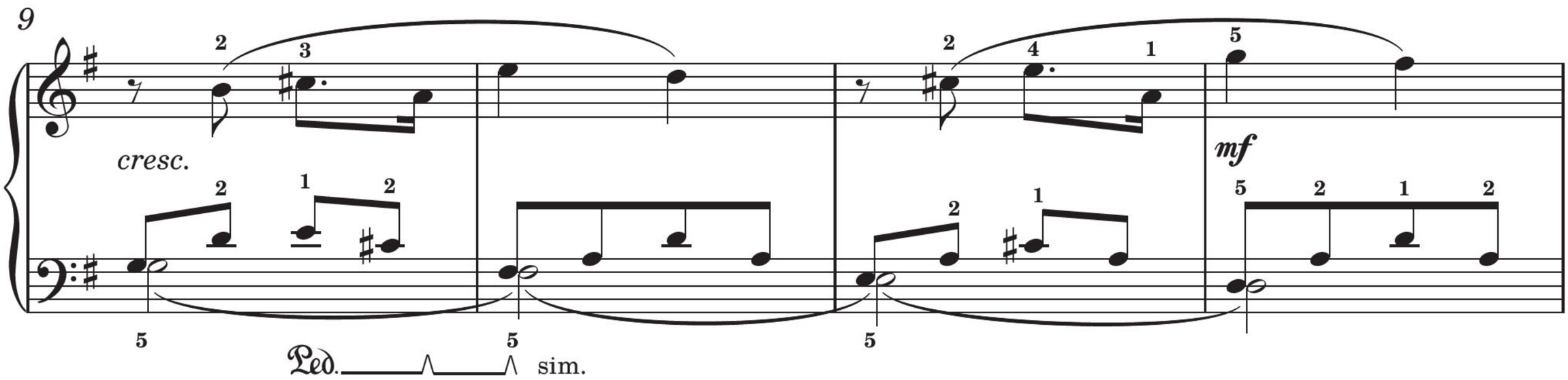
EARLY INTERMEDIATE

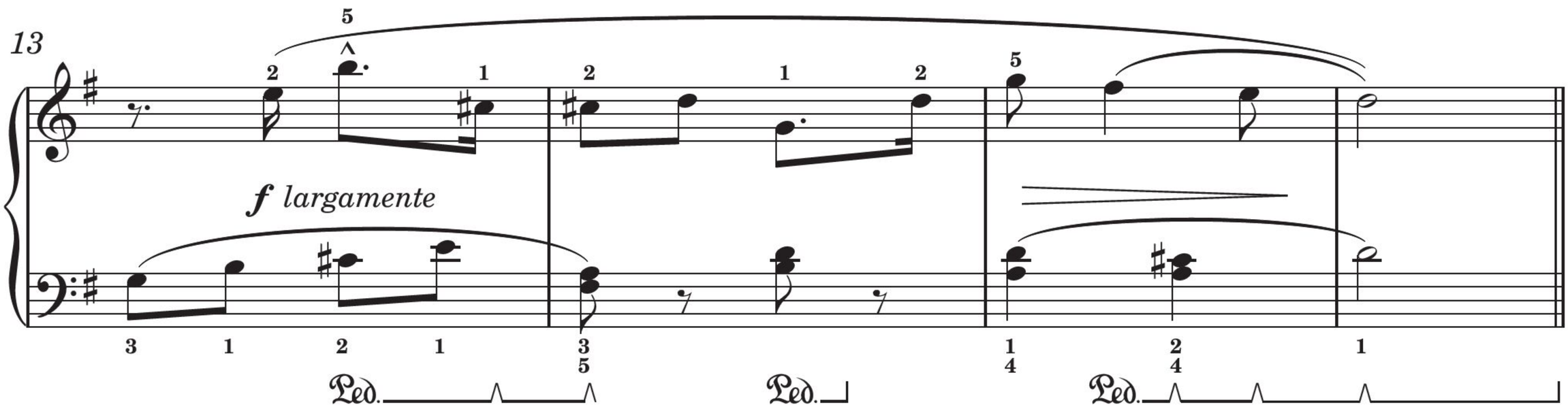
When one thinks of the great British composer of 'Nimrod' fame, one doesn't necessarily associate him with piano music! However, Elgar did compose numerous short pieces for the instrument – with such titles as *Adieu*, *Rosemary*, *Serenade* etc – and of course his wonderful and more ambitious *Salut d'Amour*, which featured inside issue 66. These all provided him with a steady and secure income. Note: The second (final) movement of the Sonatina appears inside the next issue.

**Read Nils Franke's step-by-step lesson.**



17

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

21

poco allargando

a tempo

p

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

26

Ped. sim.

31

ten.

espress.

rit.

a tempo

p

Ped. sim.

36

f largamente

p

Ped. Ped. Ped.

TRACK 6

# Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681-1767)
## Fugue No 1 in G minor TWV 30:21-26

INTERMEDIATE

Published between 1738-39, this feisty fugue by German Baroque composer Telemann would have been played on the harpsichord. It is such a wonderful piece of music – fun to play and a great introduction to fugal technique.

*Playing tips*: We suggest pinpointing all the fugue entries before you begin your work at the instrument. Then start at a very slow tempo, hands separately, making sure that your finger articulation is spot-on. There are very few dynamic indications on the score; there is no need to constantly alter the dynamics – let the music speak for itself! Bars 12-14 exude sheer joy, as does the triumphant ending. Chenyin Li adds the odd trill/ornament on this issue's album, which is fine and welcome – though by no means obligatory. Pedal is not needed.

16

*f*

19

22

*mf*

*pp*

25

*mf*

*mp cresc.*

29

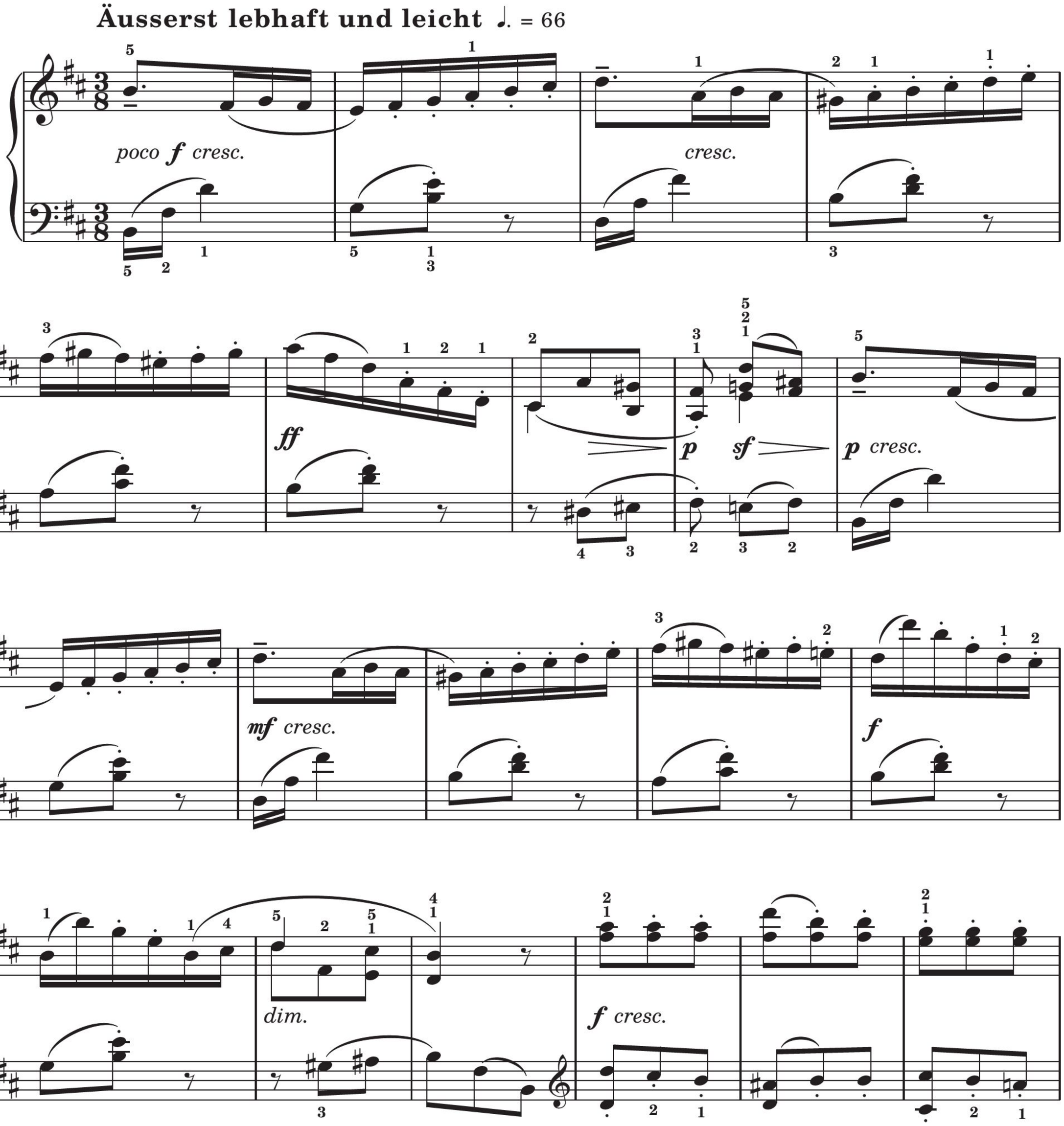
*f*

TRACK 7

# Max REGER (1873-1916)
## *Humoreske*, No 2 from 12 Klavierstücke

INTERMEDIATE

German composer Max Reger was born in Bavaria. In 1888, when he was in his early teens, he heard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* at the famous Bayreuth Festival. However, Wagnerian influence on his music was short-lived; As a composer and teacher, he was noted for his organ works (thanks to his friendship with Busoni), which use Baroque forms. In addition to organ works, Reger wrote choral and orchestral works, chamber music, songs, a piano concerto, sonatas for unaccompanied violin, three suites for solo viola, and more. The 12 Klavierstücke were written between 1898-1902.

*Playing tips*: There are no phrase markings as such, but there tends to be a two-bar 'sweeping' feeling. The first phrase could go all the way to bar 8, where you are allowed to make a small 'breath' of rubato before starting off again at bar 9 (Chenyin Li does this beautifully on the recording). As a big contrast, the music in the middle section (from bar 43) is very static, so keep the pulse ticking along within your mind as you play the long dotted-note crotchets. Pay attention to all the articulations, especially the staccatos; the touch should be precise and rhythmical.
*Pedal tips*: Use pedal scarcely – to dab on the strong beats/reinforce slurs.

21

*dim.*

***p***

***f*** *cresc.*

27

*dim.*

33

***p*** *cresc.*

***mf*** *cresc.*

38

***f***

***p***

*dim.*

43

**L'istesso tempo**

*espr.*

***p*** *cresc.*

*dim.*

50

*cresc.* *sf* *dim.*

57

***p*** *cresc.* *dim.*

64

*cresc.* **3 5** **rit.**

70

***pp*** **a tempo** *poco* ***f*** *cresc.* *cresc.*

75

***ff***

80

*f cresc.*

85

*p*

*f cresc.*

90

*dim.*

*p*

95

*cresc.*

*mf* *cresc.*

100

*ff sempre*

*sf*

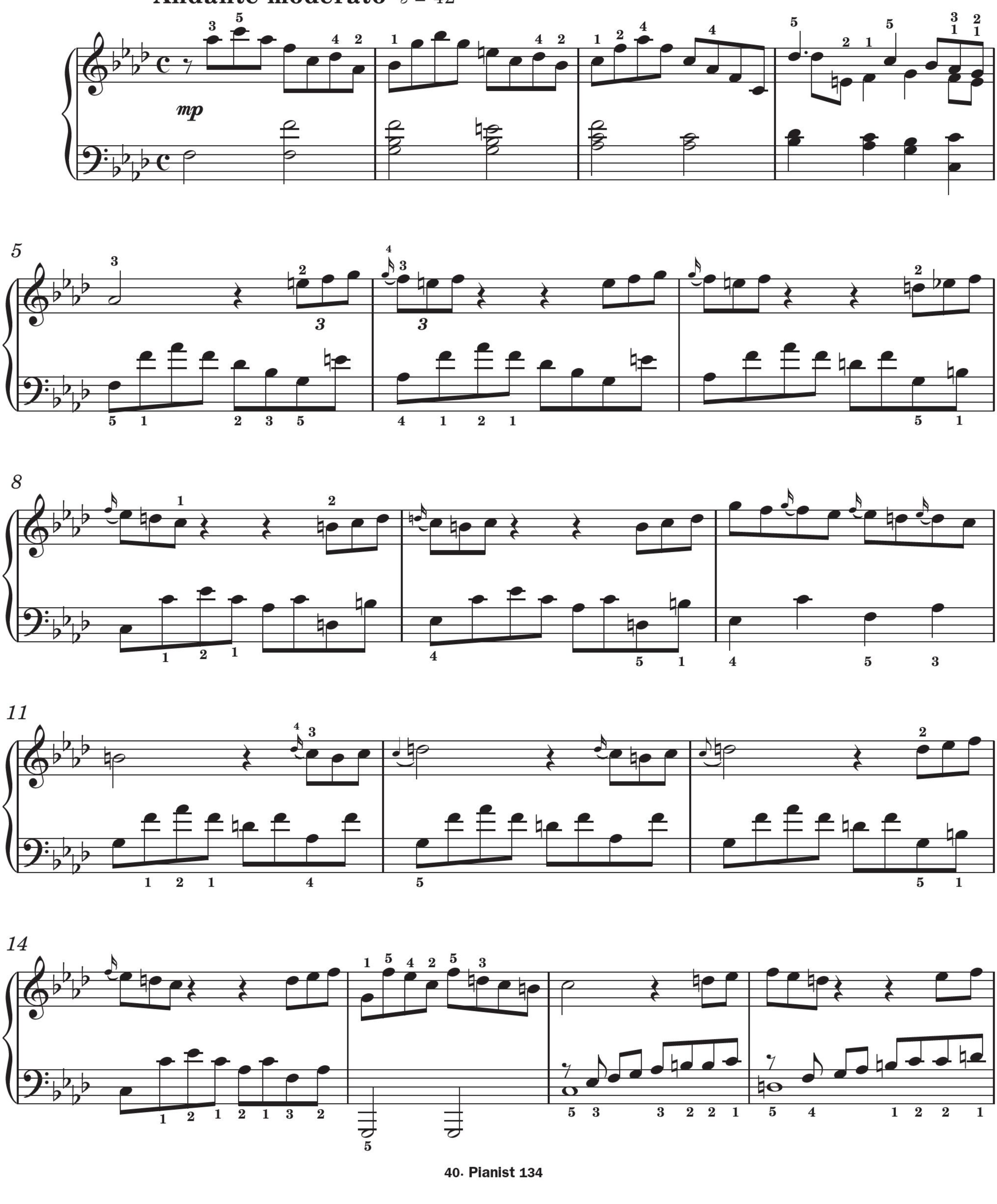
TRACK 8

# Domenico SCARLATTI (1685-1757)
## Sonata in F minor K466

INTERMEDIATE

A variety of Scarlatti sonatas have featured inside the pages of *Pianist* over the years, but this one – in the soul-searching key of F minor – has to be one of the most moving. The passionate melody that opens the piece almost feels like a precursor of music of the Romantic era. Needless to say, many concert pianists have this sonata in their repertoire.

*Playing tips*: Dynamic markings on the score are limited, and that's how Scarlatti would have wanted it; there are so many ways that the pianist can colour the notes. The most important thing is to follow the natural phrasing and try to iron out any bumps. Aim to use a good finger legato (but observe the rests); the suggested fingerings should help.

*Pedal tips*: Always trust your ears and use the pedal when finger legato alone cannot do the job. Less is more, though.

18

*cresc.*

22

*p*

25

5 3 1 3

5 4 2 1 2

28

31

*mf*

*p*

35

*mp*

38

*mf*

42

*p*

45

*mf*

*tr*

*tr*

48

*tr*

*tr*

52

*mp*

56

60

64

*p*

67

70

3 3 4

73

*pp*

TRACK 9

# Clara SCHUMANN (1819-1896)
# arr. Franz LISZT (1811-1886)
## *Geheimes Flüstern hier und dort*

INTERMEDIATE

Apart from being a famous pianist and pedagogue, Clara Schumann wrote numerous songs alongside other works in various genres. Liszt was obviously impressed by her 6 Lieder Op 23, transcribing No 3, *Geheimes Flüstern hier und dort* ('Secret Whispers here and there'), for solo piano. The original text was written by Austrian poet Hermann Rollet and it's well worth reading the whole love poem and, of course, listening to Clara's song. Liszt's transcription is a model of simplicity and transparency, maintaining the original structure with little fuss.

*Playing tips*: Use your best singing tone for the gorgeous melody, making sure that the accompaniment is calm, quiet and flowing (one should not be able to hear the notes passing from one hand to the other). Imagine that you are the singer, following the phrasing and allowing yourself time to breathe where the singer would take a new deep breath. Never stop the flow, though, as this piece should be seamless from start to end.
*Pedal tips*: Use legato pedal throughout, with mostly one change per bar – if not longer (as in bars 13-14, 23-24 and the last few bars).

15

cresc.

4

sim.

19

mf

23

Ped.

p sempre legato

26

30

cresc.

p

34

37

*pp*

40

*sempre* ***ppp***

43

46

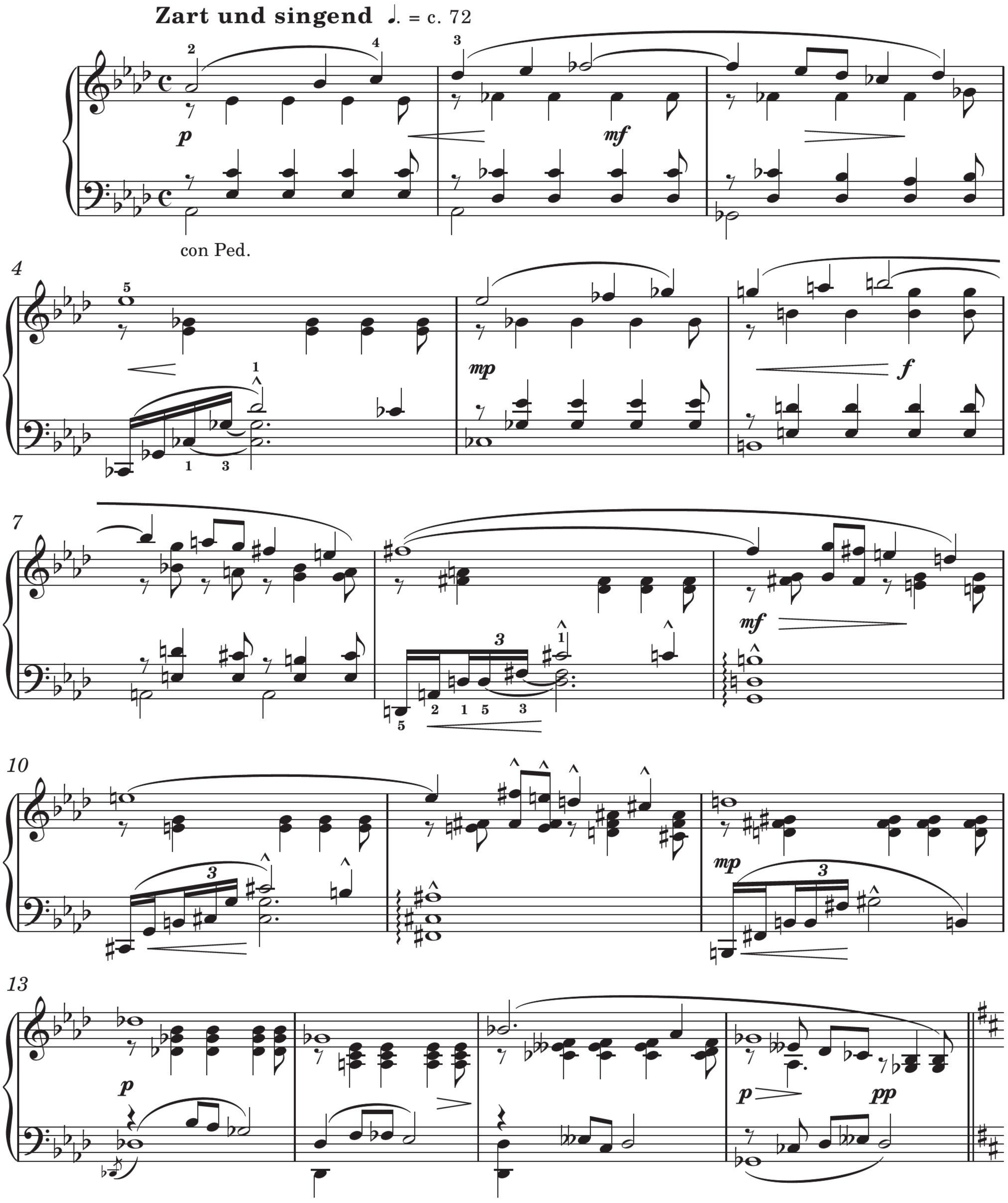
Ped.

TRACK 10

# Dora PEJAČEVIĆ (1885-1923)
## *Remembrance* Op 24

INTERMEDIATE

Born a countess into an aristocratic household, Dora Pejačević broke away from her comfortable life to forge her own path as a composer. A hundred years after her death, the Croatian composer's music is thankfully receiving the recognition it has always deserved; there are some wonderful Romantic solo piano gems to explore – this accessible *Remembrance* Op 24 being the perfect example.

*Playing tips*: Dig deep into the keys to produce a glorious tone for the RH melody. The LH is the accompaniment, but it does have its moments to shine – such as the flourishes at the start of bars 4, 8 etc and the inner descending line in bars 13-16. The middle section, which appears at bar 17, should be played with a bit more liveliness (*Etwas bewegter*).
*Pedal tips*: Change the pedal with the harmonies.

Etwas bewegter

17

mp

21

f cresc.

ff

f

rit.

24

a tempo

mp

27

mf

30

sub. p

rit.

p

33 **Tempo I**

*mp*

37

*mp*

41

5

*f*

*dim.*

45 **rit.**

*p*

*f*

49 **rit.**

*mf*

5 2 1 4 3 2 1 2

*mp*

*p*

*pp*

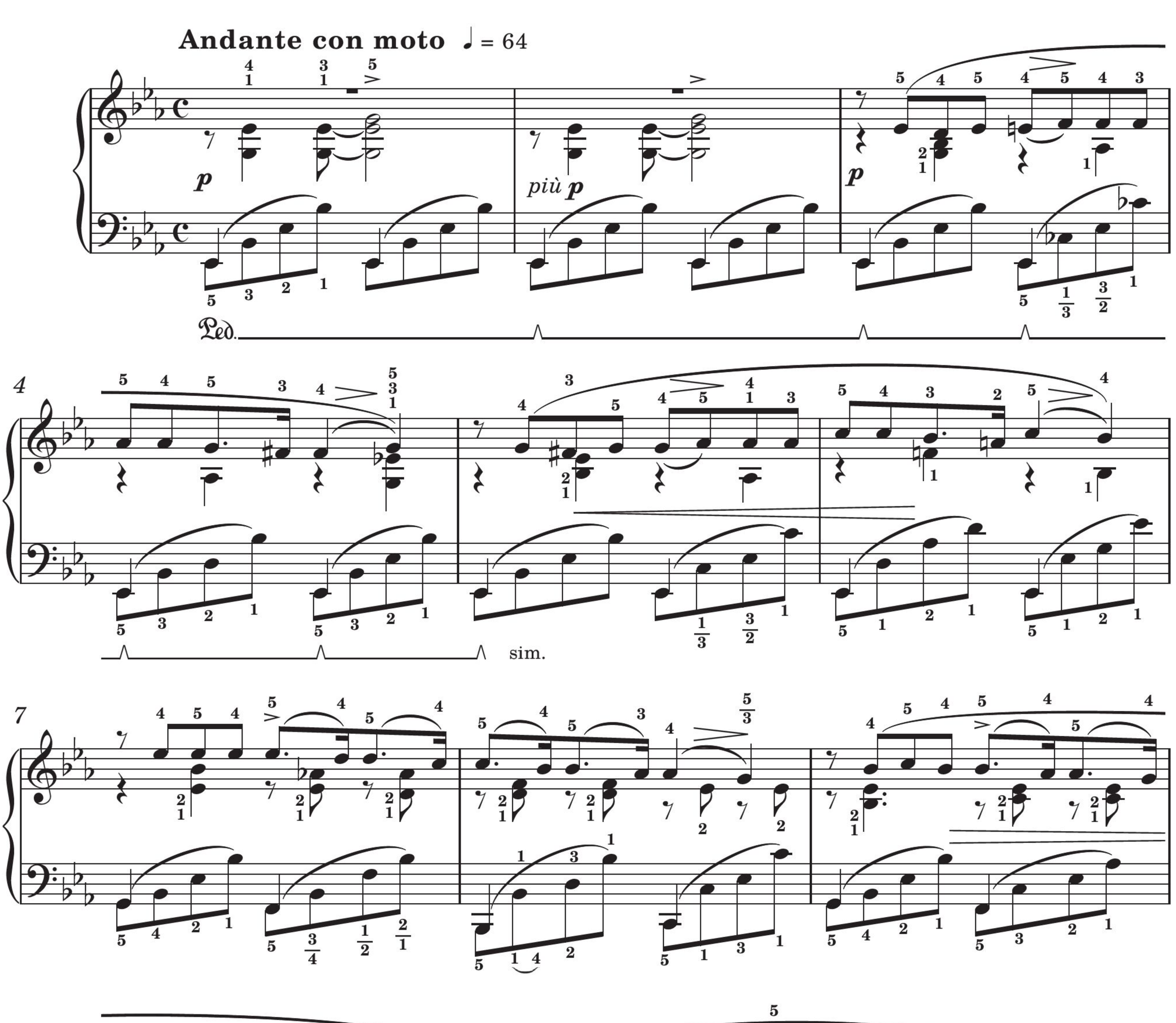
TRACK 11

# Anton RUBINSTEIN (1829-1894)
## *Romance* Op 44 No 1

LATE INTERMEDIATE

Anton Rubinstein became an important figure in Russian culture when he founded the Saint Petersburg Conservatory (his older brother Nikolai founded the Moscow Conservatory). As a pianist, he ranks among the great 19th-century keyboard virtuosos – his recital tours were legendary and well worth reading about – but he was also a prolific composer; he wrote 20 operas, five piano concertos, six symphonies and many solo piano works along with a substantial output of works for chamber ensemble. Dedicated to a countess with a very long name (!), the Romance – the first piece from his *6 Soirées à Saint-Petersbourg* – was published in 1859.

*Playing tips*: Tempting as it may be, try not to learn the piece from the start. A good place to begin your practice is at bar 21, where, with its two-against-three rhythm, the notes are technically harder to grasp. Always practise extremely slowly, making sure that the rhythm is spot-on between the hands. Then, spend your time learning the end. Once you have mastered these last two pages, the first page will be a pleasure to learn. Remember to shape the melody line, taking note of the phrase markings, the necessary accents and all the dynamics. Hands separate practise would be advisable.
*Pedal tips*: See suggestions on the score.



13

*p*

16

*p*

sim.

19

rall.

a tempo

*p*

Ped.

sim.

22

25

poco a poco accel. ed agitato

*cresc.*

28

**poco a poco rall.**

*molto cresc.*

*ff*

31

**a tempo**

*sf*

*appassionato*

*ff*

Ped.

35

*mf cresc.*

*più cresc.*

*f*

38

*più* ***f***

***p***

*espress.*

41

*più* ***p***

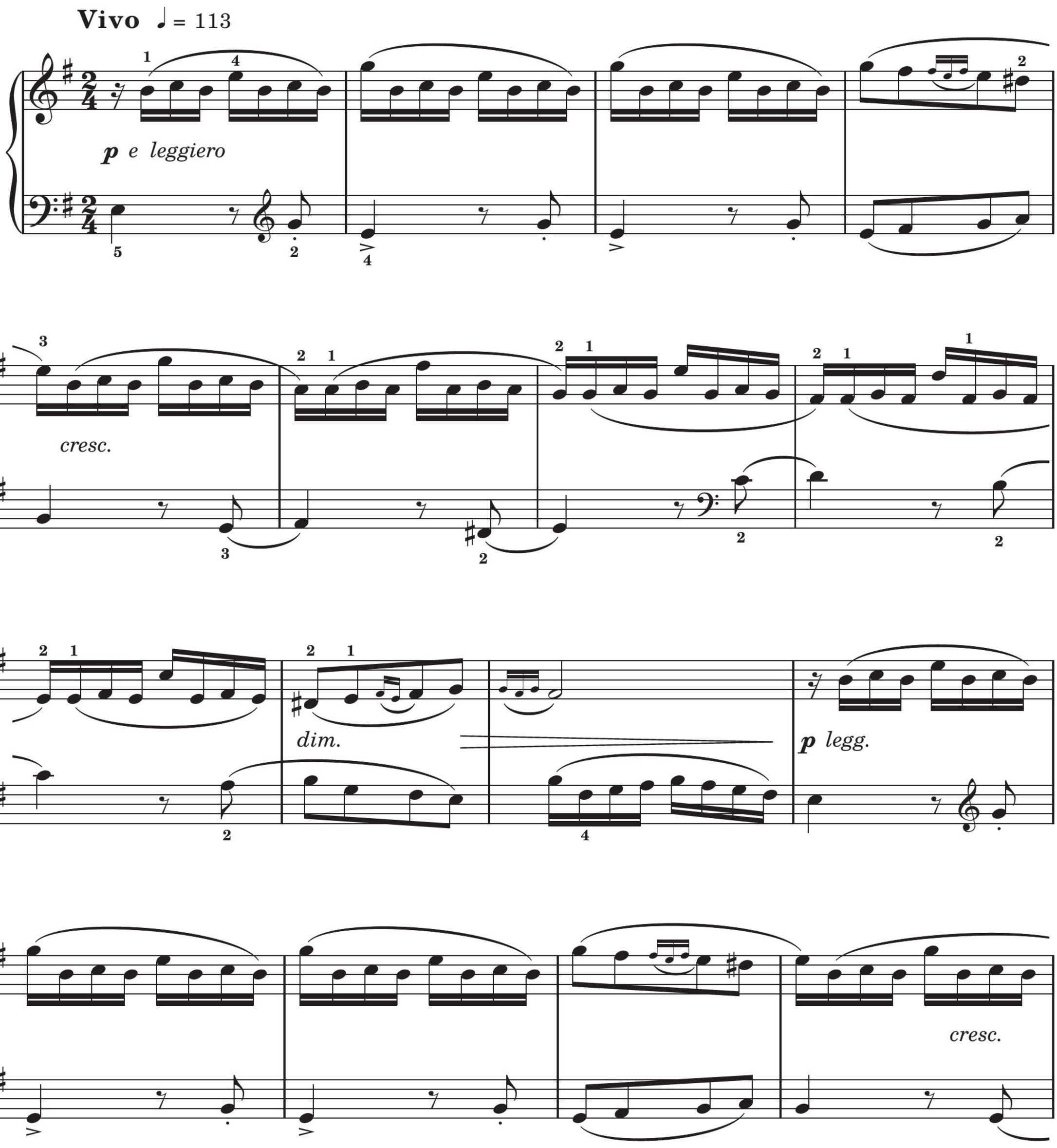
*8va*

***pp***

TRACK 12

# Louis-Claude DAQUIN (1694-1772)
## *Le Coucou* (Rondo)

INTERMEDIATE/
ADVANCED

French Baroque composer Louis-Claude Daquin was a virtuoso organist and harpsichordist. He was courted by the aristocracy, and his great expertise at the organ drew large crowds to hear him. He was known for his 'unfaltering precision and evenness' at both the harpsichord and organ. In Rondo form, this evocative piece appears within Daquin's third suite of his Pièces de clavecin. Written in 1735, *Le Coucou* imitates the sprightly call of the cuckoo bird at its most vocal. It has been a favourite among pianists and works a treat as an encore on the concert platform.
*Playing tips*: Think of the timbre of the harpsichord, which is a very different sound to that of a modern-day piano. The notes need to sound 'plucked' – quite the opposite of a legato *cantabile*. Each striking of the key should be clear and decisive – as 'alert' as the cuckoo itself – but never with an attacked or harsh sound. Keep things light and imagine that you are plucking the notes. Pedal is not required.

17

21

rit.

a tempo

dim.

p legg.

25

5

3

29

p

cresc.

33

37

41

tr

mf

p legg.

45

cresc.

49

dim.

53

p legg.

57

*cresc.*

61

*dim.*

65

*p*

*poco a poco crescendo*

69

73

*mf e sempre crescendo*

77

*f*

80

*tr*

84

*cresc.*

88

**poco rit.**

92

**a tempo**

*p e legg.*

96

cresc.

100

104

*pp* *legg.*

108

*poco cresc.*

112

rit.

*dim.*

*pp*

TRACK 13

DON'T MISS IAGO NÚÑEZ'S **LESSON** ON THIS PIECE

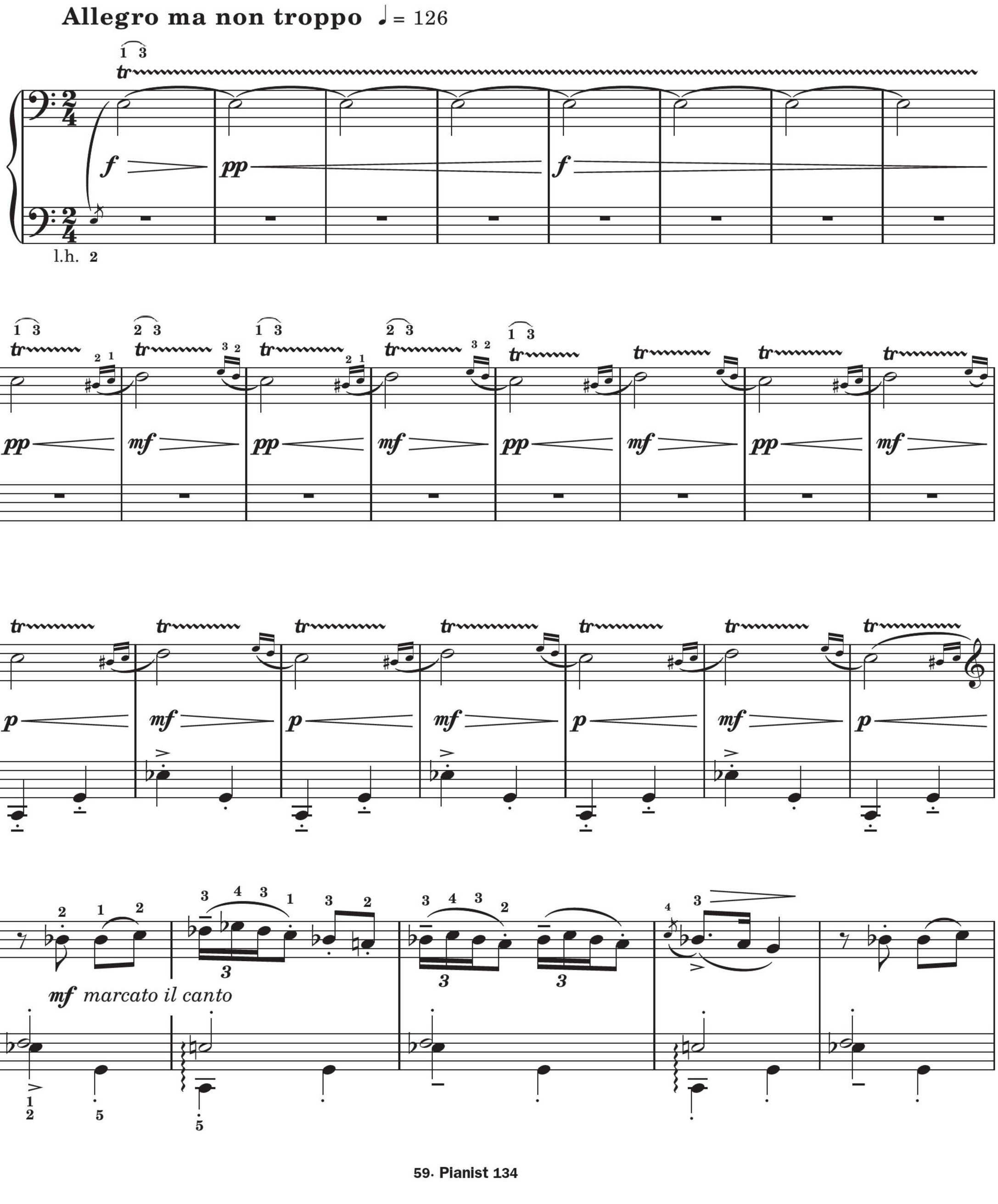
# Manuel de FALLA (1876-1946)

## *Ritual Fire Dance*

ADVANCED

**CLICK HERE TO WATCH Iago Núñez's lesson | CLICK HERE TO WATCH Iago Núñez's performance**

*Ritual Fire Dance* (in Spanish, 'Danza ritual del fuego') is a movement from the ballet, *El amor brujo* ('Love, the Magician'), written by the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla in 1915. The plot is as such: a young Andalusian gypsy girl called Candela is haunted by the ghost of her dead husband. To get rid of him, all the gypsies make a large circle around their campfire at midnight. Candela then performs the 'Ritual Fire Dance'. This causes the ghost to appear, with whom she then dances. As they whirl around faster and faster, the ghost is drawn into the fire, making it vanish forever. Exciting, indeed! The composer's own piano arrangement of *Ritual Fire Dance* was made even more popular by Arthur Rubinstein's famous interpretation, which can easily be tracked down on YouTube. As Iago Núñez tells us in his lesson, it's easier than it looks, so give it a go – your audience will be spellbound!

**Read Iago Núñez's step-by-step lesson. Núñez plays the track on the *Pianist* album, and also gives a performance and a 'hot tips' video lesson at www.pianistmagazine.com/lessons.**

29

34

39

*ff e molto marcato*

44

49

54

5

4 2 1 5 4 2 1

sfz sfz sfz

59

p tr

f

67

pp

73

ff

78

4 5 4 3 4

3

molto dim.

pp

84

89

mf cresc.

94

To Coda

f

dim.

99

p cresc.

ff

dim.

p cresc.

104

ff

dim.

p

109

115

*p* *cresc.*

*ff*

*dim.*

*p* *cresc.*

121

*ff*

*dim.*

*p*

**poco rit.**

*pp*

126

**a tempo**

*morendo*

*pp*

132

*più* *pp*

*poco*

*f*

**D. S. al Coda**

## Coda

### Poco a poco affrettando

*p marc.*

*sfz*

145

*mf*

*cresc.*

*sfz*

*sempre cresc.*

149

*mf* *cresc.*

*ff* *p subito*

*cresc.*

153

*f*

### Più mosso, ma giusto

*sffz*

*molto marc.*

157

8va

sffz

161

8va

sffz

8va

165

(8)

sffz

8va

ff sempre

169

177

fff

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# PIANO TEACHER HELP DESK

## Physically-speaking

With increased awareness of safeguarding issues, it is imperative for teachers to study proper guidelines thoroughly before engaging in physical contact with a student, says **Kathryn Page**

Touching students to help them understand what they should be striving for with regard to posture, physical approach and connection with the instrument is nowadays an extremely sensitive, even controversial subject, but one which all piano teachers need to be aware of. There is nothing new in using touch to help guide a pianist towards heightened awareness, especially in regard to physical tension. There is a grand tradition in teaching, perhaps especially amongst celebrated female gurus from Eastern Europe, of being very tactile with pupils from the first lesson. Hands are used to guide wrist position, finger curvature and arm alignment. If shoulders are raised, it is not uncommon for teachers to automatically lower through direct physical contact. If the back legs of the piano stool rise off the ground as a student plays, then they may find that the chair is immediately man-handled and brought quickly down with no prior warning to the surface of the floor.

Forgive me if I digress a little here and outline safeguarding essentials before continuing to discuss physical contact with our students. As professional educators we have a duty of care to all the pupils we teach. For vulnerable individuals and children especially, we have to comply with guidelines and adhere to a code of conduct which is expected not only in schools but in all educational institutions. If we are teaching children on our own in an otherwise deserted private house, we may be making ourselves potentially vulnerable. Obtaining a DBS certificate and ensuring that we are completely aware of all the guidelines as comprehensibly covered in KCSIE [Keeping Children Safe in Education, see link at the end] 2023 is strongly recommended to all private music teachers. In fact, it is an absolute necessity if you wish to maintain integrity and avoid potential accusations and controversy.

Back to touch as a means of education – as a pedagogical tool. Many years back the ISM (Incorporated Society of Musicians) recommended that if touch was to be used in lessons, the tutor should explain clearly in advance why they wished to use it – and most certainly not proceed to do so unless full consent is given by the student. In other words, don't use physical touch unless for specific reasons. Always review your studio policy for touch at the beginning of a new academic year. Additionally, never touch a pupil without obtaining their consent in advance.

Kathryn Page has appeared in concert and on television as a soloist and in chamber music. She is a teacher, adjudicator and administrator for Chetham's International Summer School and Festival for Pianists. Her interest in contemporary music has led to many world premieres including works by Gary Carpenter, Alisdair Nicholson and Django Bates. She lives in Cheshire and has five children.

> In my own teaching I would feel that physical intervention from me thwarts invaluable pedagogical discussion and self-help

### Is it necessary?

If this all sounds too time consuming and laborious to work effectively in practice, I can honestly put my hand on my heart and say that personally I very rarely have any reason to touch my own students in lessons. Instead of lowering the right wrist if it is raised uncomfortably, I ask the student to lower their wrist with their left hand. If they have stiffness in their left elbow, I get them to massage and rotate it using their right hand. If their shoulders are raised, I ask them to raise them even further, then lower them. If they repeat up-down-up-down shoulder movements regularly on their own as exercises, the message of not raising them seems to become hard wired more quickly.

Though I have the greatest respect for tutors who continue to touch students (with appropriate forewarning and explanation) ultimately in my own teaching I would feel that physical intervention from me thwarts invaluable pedagogical discussion and self-help. If you grab a student's shoulders and thrust them down, you are surely 'spoon-feeding' without explanation. Quite apart from the physical intrusion, such an approach stops students from experimenting and thinking for themselves. By all means use touch in teaching – but for the best results I always recommend that pupils touch themselves rather than relying on their teacher to do it for them. ■

*KCSIE information can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2*

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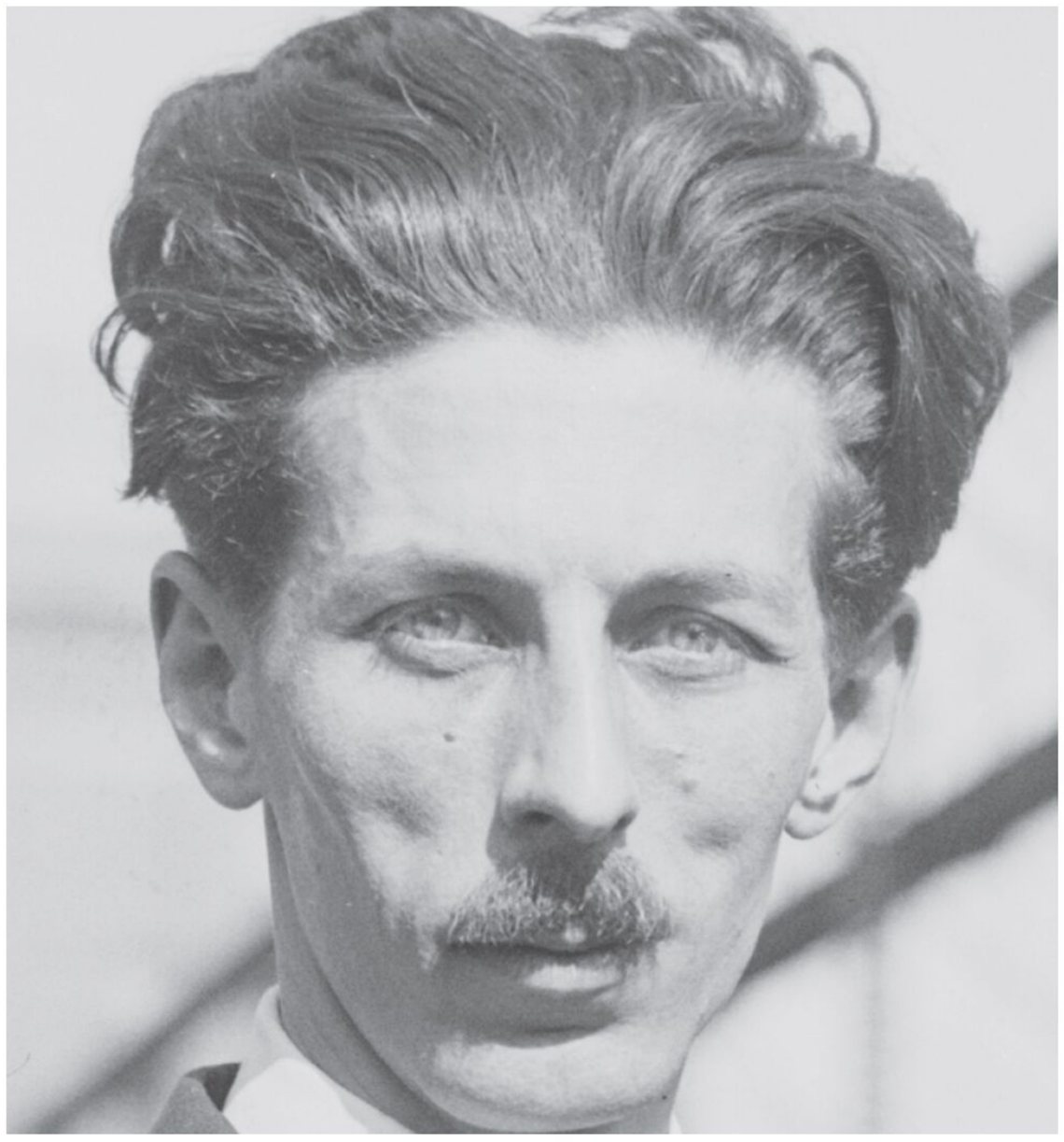
# AHEAD OF ITS TIME

Over 100 years ago, a relatively unknown French pianist-teacher made his thoughts known on piano technique. **Erica Worth** is impressed and hopes to spread the word



Some months back I came across a captivating recording of the Debussy Préludes. It was performed by an unknown (to me, anyway) French pianist and teacher by the name of Elie Robert Schmitz (pictured). I was curious and delved further, discovering a fascinating interview he gave in 1920 on 'Pianoforte Technic'. There is a lot here that many a *Pianist* reader would do well to read (I for one, have learned a lot about my own playing!), so I present the highlights. Schmitz's use of the English language might be a tad clunky here and there, but I didn't wish to tamper unnecessarily. I'd be curious to hear what readers think.

Erica

**'It is quite easy for one to point out the defects** in a technical or pedagogical system, but to provide constructive material of real worth to substitute for deficient methods is another matter. American teachers must themselves be aware of two single faults in teaching methods which have not been confined, by any means, to this country alone. I refer to these palpable shortcomings: The student is told:

*I—To play the piano*
*II—To play like me*

'That is, the teacher says, in the first instance: "Here is the music, now play it and at the next lesson I will criticise you." Criticism means pointing out to the student this and that thing which does not please the teacher. The poor pupil is therefore blamed for errors which he makes out of his own ignorance. It never seems to occur to the teacher that it is his duty to make the pupil understand how to play before he permits him to play. That is, the pupil should understand certain principles which must be mastered before his brain can work correctly and profitably, without the waste of the time of both the teacher and the student.

'The second error comes from encouraging the student to imitate. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but mere imitation without original creative thinking is liable to be destructive to the pupil's initiative and to the development of his own artistic sense, without which his playing becomes insufferable. The pupil cannot act without being told how. The actions of the hands and arms of the master pianist are so complicated and at the same time so subtle that only an artist can explain how they are done. The pupil who is encouraged to imitate may struggle through months of disappointment and never achieve anything. More than this, there are very few students with an analytical power of any consequence.

'Then it should be remembered that imitation is the lowest phase of education. It is the monkey stage, and requires the least brain action. For this reason one should start from these standpoints. Rather let the teacher provide the pupil with a definite reason for the principal kinds of action at the keyboard. Only in this way can the pupil acquire a technique that will include the mind, the muscles and the nerves. Piano playing is an art and not merely a few cheap tricks learned by empirical practice or by imitation. When one has mastered the art of piano playing, when one knows the science of this art, one comes into possession of something of real tangible value, not an inconsequential nothing composed of a few clap-trap devices.

'Piano playing may be studied through four phases or divisions:

'In the first section I would place that of mental concept. This would embrace, first of all, everything that has to do with correct notation and the interpretation of that notation. This is the "know how" phase. Schumann, great tone poet that he was, did not perfectly comprehend the matter of writing properly and beautifully for the orchestra. His pianoforte works and his songs are masterly, as are his orchestral works, but he did not comprehend the proper way of bringing out the best from the various instruments as did, for instance, Wagner and Berlioz. Here we have a great master deficient in this mental phase of notation.

'In a vastly less manner there are thousands of students who struggle with music for years, who do not properly know the subject of notation and the interpretation of that notation. In this phase, I would place everything from the learning of the notes to all of the finer points that are liable to come upon the printed music page. No one can advance very much until these principles have been mastered. What really happens? Thousands of students have some elementary instruction book which is employed to teach them the clefs, the staff, the notes, pitch and a few other things, after which the subject of notation and its interpretation is abandoned. The student should learn to master all of the various notations for all of the rhythmic forms, all the shades of expression, all the phases of touch, so that the printed page will have a real significance to him. He should become able to uphold his personal interpretation by a logical understanding of not only the notation but also the concept which the composer succeeded more or less to express and define by the notation.

'Too little attention is given to this mental phase by teachers. Exercises in time, rhythm, dynamics and so on, are neglected, to the loss of the pupil. To revert to the case of Schumann, here we have the case of a tone poet of great genius (sometimes considered organically superior to Beethoven), whose orchestral expression (that is, his understanding of the possibilities of the instruments of the orchestra and how to indicate these means on paper) was so deficient that it often happened that others had to fix up his works. This was also the case of Mussorgsky. Mussorgsky was deficient in the mental phase of his technical development. Rimsky-Korsakov was obliged to rework many of Mussorgsky's works. There are numerous pianists who are so deficient in this mental phase that they have never gained the control of their own possibilities.

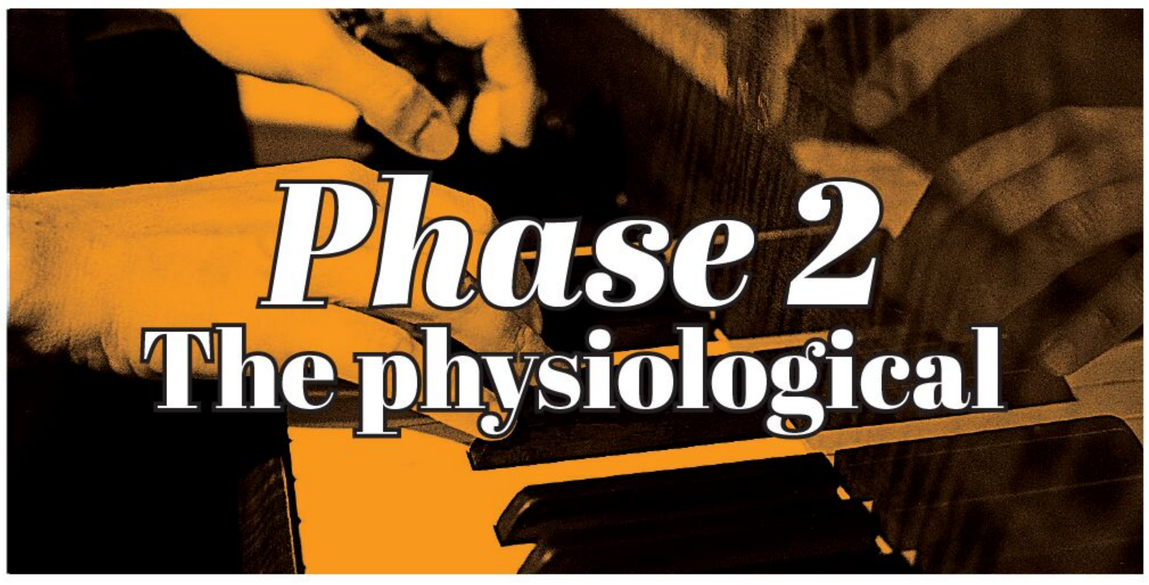
'The mental phase embraces a very great number of things and affords the serious student material for years of study. It includes broad principles and little matters of detail. For instance, in the mental phase would come the principle that when a melody ascends it generally gathers intensity or force. When it descends it diminishes in force, tending toward relaxation. This principle is observed almost universally by sensitive artists. Take the Busoni edition of Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues, for instance, and note how the great interpreter has indicated that the phrases gain in intensity as the pitch ascends.

'Another phase perfectly obvious to the artist is that well-established rhythmic principle in which science correlates, release of weight with the sustained tones and lifts the rests or shorter values. The lift creates potential energy – kinetic energy is gathered through motion; that is, the release of lifted weight. The alternation of these two constitutes what can be termed 'rhythmical dynamism.'

'Another principle is the relative thickness or thinness of the scoring. By this I mean the volume of tone requested by

'The student should learn to master all of the various notations for all of the rhythmic forms, all the shades of expression, all the phases of touch, so that the printed page will have a real significance to him'

the varying quantity of voices. For instance, a single melody would not command the same volume that the pianist would be expected to give to the same melody played in octaves. If the same melody were to be amplified by chords, the third degree of force would be expected. This general principle is readily understood if the performer will realize that the composer naturally expects more tone volume as he multiplies the number of voices. It is similar to the organist who pulls out a large number of stops. This produces a great volume of tone. If he employs only one or two of the lighter stops the volume of tone is slight. Of course, all general principles of this kind are subject to modification. Sometimes a single melodic phrase expressed with a single line of notes calls for a stentorian tone. In general, however, the score "thickens" as the number of voices increases, and where great chords are employed, the composer has intended that volume of tone shall increase.




'The second stage of pianoforte study I would call the physiological phase. This phase is second in order only, but by no means secondary in importance. Like the other phases it should be worked in alternation, each phase reacting upon

the other. It is my conviction that unless one understands the nature of the playing apparatus – and by that I mean the general character of the muscular apparatus from the shoulder to the keyboard, and, more than this, the relation of this general apparatus to the body as a whole – one cannot properly and intelligently be expected to play really well. Let us take, for instance, one little principle. There is a great prejudice among certain teachers in the matter of investigating the muscles and the nerve centre employed in playing. This prejudice is due to ignorance. These teachers think that such knowledge makes the player self-conscious. On the contrary, it frees the intelligent pupil from various phases of self-consciousness. These days, every student must have differentiated in his mind the principal sets of muscles employed in piano playing: (1) The extensors (and triceps) – that is, the muscles that extend the fingers or the arms; and the flexors (and triceps) – that is, the muscles which bend the fingers or the arms; (2) the abductors and adductors, which enable the fingers to separate or get close together again;

'A single melody would not command the same volume that the pianist would be expected to give to the same melody played in octaves'

(3) the rotation muscles in the forearm, controlling rotation.

'This much is very simple. The pupil says, "When I make a stroke of any kind I employ the flexor muscles." But he does not know that his extensor should be relaxed at that time. That is the beginning of the error, as it is impossible to employ one set without bringing into play the other set. It is perfectly possible for the mind to concentrate upon either the flexors or the extensors. The trouble is that thousands of students do not realize this. The result is that there is a kind of tug of war between the two sets of muscles which has only one name—muscular tension. While this exists, relaxation is impossible. If the contraction of both sets of muscles occurs at the same time, there results a stiffening of the hand, arm and fingers which is an enemy to good tone and technique alike. When there is contraction of the lower set of muscles there should be complete relaxation of the upper set and vice versa.

'What however, is the usual prescription given to the pupil? He is told to relax his arm, and he tries his best to make it like a jelly fish by relaxing both complementary muscles. The moment he makes a stroke, or muscular effort of any kind, however, he will contract both complementary (opposite) muscles and all of his old troubles flock back instantly. The pupil should know the name, function and position of all the main muscles and ligaments employed in piano playing. This is all a part of his technique. In time it becomes second nature. It does not obtrude itself on his art in the least. In fact, his art is upon a very unsteady basis without it. The architect who builds beautiful structures must devote years to the study of mechanical drawing and higher mathematics. Does all this necessary study destroy the loveliness of the buildings he produces? Not in the least—if he did not have this knowledge he would be a bungling amateur.

'The third phase of the study of the instrument is the instrument itself. Very few people know anything whatever of the nature of the piano. Even the very simplest things are not understood. Take the matter of the piano key, the thing we put into motion when we play. What is it? A lever—with all the characteristics of a lever. If one piano key were exposed to view as a single lever we might learn that a weight placed at the end of the key, which would be sufficient to weigh down the key, need not be so heavy as a weight placed one inch further in on the key. It is simple to try this experiment with a weight sufficient to depress the key when it is placed at the edge nearest the player. Move the weight nearer the music desk and note that it ceases to depress the key. One popular example of a lever is the see-saw. Everyone recollects how the weight of the person sitting on the end of this big lever affects the leverage very much more than when one moves toward the middle, or the fulcrum.

'We may learn from this that when we play upon the edge of the keys nearest the player, less power is needed; while, when we play on the keys near the desk or near the black keys more strength is required. Apply this to the pianistic effects and we will realize that when we require force we must play toward the edge of the keys unless we wish to multiply the strain upon the playing muscles. The difference in tone therefore is seriously affected by the point at which you touch the key, providing one employs the same degree of strength at both places. This is only one of many, many things which the student should know about the piano before various phases of touch are considered. The intelligent and experienced teacher provides the pupil with this knowledge and thereby does away with a great deal of time wasting due to a lack of grasp of fundamental principles.

'Finally, the student has to consider the effect of the vibrations he created. He must know the impression that his interpretation makes. He must judge his own playing as though he were hearing it himself, in the audience. By means of this he constantly corrects and improves his work at every step. There must be a continual rotation of sound creations, sound analysis and correction. It may be shown in a circle like this: If one

follows the direction of the arrows one may conceive that unless the condition of every section of the circle is thoroughly 'live' and responsive, the initial concept (mental vision of the music) will encounter points of interference (such as stiff wrists) where a detrimental loss of quality will occur.

'It is impossible to employ one set of muscles without bringing into play the other set'

## Conclusion

'1 The mind receives the impression from the printed page.

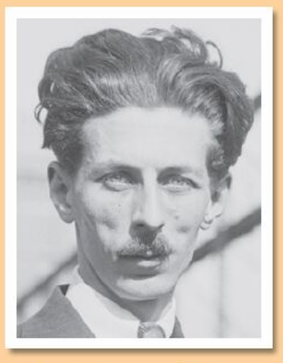
2 The mind telegraphs the message to the arm, hands and fingers, setting in operation the muscles.

3 The key moves a hammer which strikes a string and sets the wires in vibration.

4 The sound travels back to the mind through the ear and is there analysed for its effect.

These four processes are perfectly obvious, but it is necessary to point out that the fourth process is the one most neglected. It is in this process that the pupil's self-advancement is often most positively located. Unless the pupil is taught to analyse the effects he produces himself, much of his other work will be wasted. He must learn through his ear the thousand and one niceties of tone gradation, and his experience and intelligence must tell him how to reproduce these effects at command.' ■

## A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY: *E. Robert Schmitz 1889-1949*



A protégé of Debussy, Paris-born E. Robert Schmitz studied with Louis-Joseph Diémer at the Paris Conservatoire where he won first prize in piano. After graduation, he first toured Europe then the US in 1919 and, the following year, founded the Franco-American Music Society in New York. During this period, the first American appearances of Bartók and Ravel were sponsored, as well as lectures and concerts by Schoenberg, Prokofiev and Stravinsky. Schmitz also had a personal and professional friendship with Charles Ives.

Schmitz published his system of piano study, *The Capture of Inspiration*, in 1935, as well as editions of the Chopin Studies, Bach's Two-Part Inventions and other works that included explanatory texts on his method. His book, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, a technical analysis with commentary, was published posthumously in 1950. Among his pupils were the composers Samuel Dolin, Harry Somers and Gertrude Price Wollner.

Schmitz recorded the Complete Debussy Préludes for RCA Victor (Sony) in 1942, in addition to other works for Edison Records. He died in California in 1949.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A young Robert von Bahr in familiar territory

# A TRULY GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

## 50 years of BIS Records

A stunning account of Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes* from Chinese pianist Haochen Zhang is merely one of the latest superb recordings from the boutique Swedish record label BIS. As it celebrates its 50th anniversary, **Warwick Thompson** talks to charismatic founder Robert von Bahr about his world-beating roster of pianists

You know the term 'slush pile'? It refers to the depressing heap of unsolicited manuscripts (or, more probably, terabyte of emails) waiting to be read by publishers. I'm not sure what the equivalent term for a heap of unsolicited recordings is, but Robert von Bahr probably does. The founder of Swedish record label BIS receives sackfuls each year. The majority aren't good enough for the label, but, even after all this time, he guarantees that he will listen to every single one of them.

Here's the reason why. In the early 1970s he wanted to help his then-wife, the flautist Gunilla von Bahr, to make an LP. 'I contacted all the labels on Gunilla's behalf and got no response at all,' he tells me during our very entertaining Zoom chat. 'So I sent out a cassette to show what she could do, and again heard a big zero.' Even now, all these years later, his voice takes on a harsher tone as he discusses the events. 'So I made a vow never to treat artists on my label like we were treated back then. Artists are human beings. They deserve a listen, and I'll always make a comment on my reasons if I reject them.'

Just to prove that artists *can* make it out of the slush heap, he mentions Yevgeny Sudbin, who as a young whippersnapper sent in a tape, just like everyone else: and von Bahr was so impressed with his Scarlatti, that he sent it to the second-in-command Robert Saff, and they immediately signed him. Now Sudbin is one of the most popular pianists on the label, and has recorded 25 discs since then.

But to return to the story of Gunilla's album. 'I got angry at all the silence. So we commissioned a few works, and hired an orchestra, and sent a third round of cassettes. And after many more rejections, one label eventually offered us a contract.'

Gunilla's LP did very well, selling around 4,000 copies, but the von Bahrs didn't see a Krona of any royalties. That wasn't

part of the contract. They'd also had to provide the master tape free of charge to the label. 'Of course, after that success, the label wanted to make another one. And I thought: no, I can do it better myself.'

And so it was, in 1973, when he was just 30, BIS was born.

## The business of music

Actually, that's just one of the several 'origin stories' of the label. But the others show equally impressive amounts of pluck.

Here's another angle. After finishing his degree at Stockholm university (studying law, economics, languages and psychology), von Bahr decided to prioritise his musical interests. He took up a place at Stockholm Conservatory to study music teaching and singing pedagogy.

(Since we're going to be talking later specifically about pianists on the label, I interject at this point and ask if he himself is a pianist as well as singer. 'Yes, I needed to play in order to be a teacher, but I was never any good at all,' is his wistful response.)

In order to pay for his education, he worked as a singer in various groups, including the Stockholm Philharmonic Choir. To supplement his income, he also bought Swiss coins for smelting: he'd discovered that their silver

> 'If a player can tell a story with their hands and minds, we will always want to work with them'
>
> **Robert von Bahr, CEO, BIS Records**

content was in excess of their currency value, so he regularly transported them in his old Volkswagen from Basel to Stockholm to sell. Wanting to use all the available space in his car, he also bought Revox tape machines in Switzerland, and sold them on at home too. 'As you can see, I was always something of a businessman,' he says with a grin. He kept one of the machines for himself, bought two microphones, and offered to make recordings of his musical friends. Having learned the process of recording technology 'on the job' as it were, he then approached his boss at the Stockholm Philharmonic and offered to produce archive tapes of all their concerts. Soon he was recording artists of the calibre of Barenboim and Segovia for the archive.

It's clear to see that when he came to set up BIS a few years later, he already possessed a great deal of business nous and an excellent musical ear. An ideal combination, really, for the chief of a record label.

His legal training soon came in handy as well. 'I used to use two large suitcases to distribute my LPs around various shops, until I was told I would have to pay an extra train fare for them because they were over a certain size. So I asked to see the regulations, and went through them carefully with my legal hat on. I discovered that a pram was free of charge – and nowhere did it say that there had to be a baby in it – so I loaded up a pram with my LPs, and went smiling through the gates, and didn't pay the extra fare.' There was another benefit too. 'The TV news somehow got hold of the story, and ran a piece on me. And it meant that when I called shops to sell them my albums, rather than put the phone down, they said – ah, you're the guy with the pram! It really helped.'

Another boost came when the world's leading dramatic soprano Birgit Nilsson, whom he knew from his work with the Stockholm Philharmonic, agreed to record a lieder recital on BIS: it was the company's 15th album (BIS-15). Her imprimatur ensured that international distributers took a much more favourable view of the fledgling company from that point onwards.

## Soloists both bold and subtle

I'm keen for us to discuss the pianists on the label, so ask who Nilsson's accompanist was. 'It was János Sólyom – a really wonderful player. A Hungarian pianist then living in Sweden. Sadly no longer with us.' (He also recorded *Pictures at an Exhibition* for the label.)

And what was the first big piano success? 'That was undoubtedly a disc by the Swedish pianist Dag Achatz (BIS-188). He'd made an arrangement of *Le Sacre du printemps* for – as he put it – "two hands, two feet, and a nose." Yes, he really used his nose. It was an amazing arrangement, and he subsequently toured it all over the world with great success, but I have to say that the piano he recorded it on never recovered. It was really smashed up. In fact the dynamic range he required was so huge, that I decided to record the piece on an LP-sized disc, but played at 45rpm. It created a sensation.'

I'm planning at this point to ask him about some of the current BIS keyboard stars – performers such as Alexandre Kantorow, Haochen Zhang, Noriko Ogawa, Yevgeny Sudbin – but before we come to them, he wants to flag up someone just as special, but who sometimes gets overlooked. 'I really want to mention Joseph Middleton [an accompanist and chamber player]. It's so easy to talk about the big soloists, and one sometimes forgets the guy in the background. But he's the reason his partners' records are so good. Of course he's

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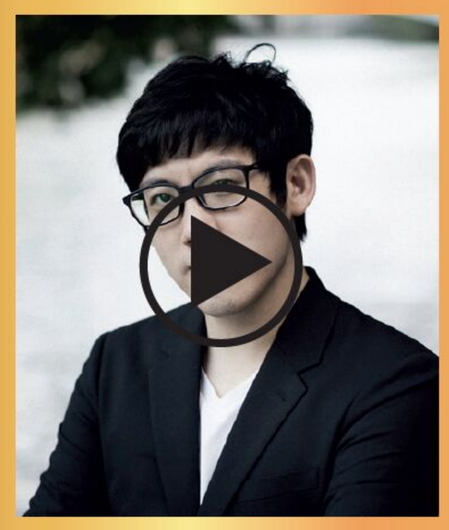
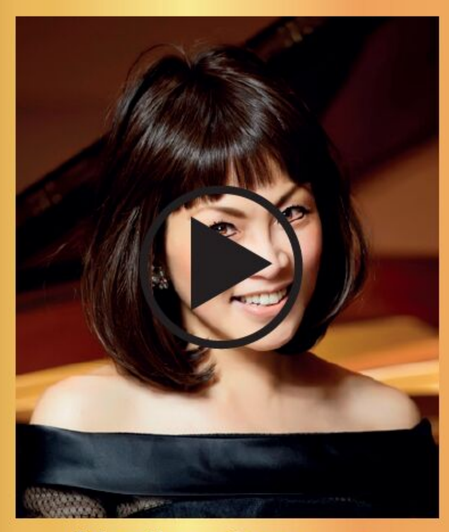
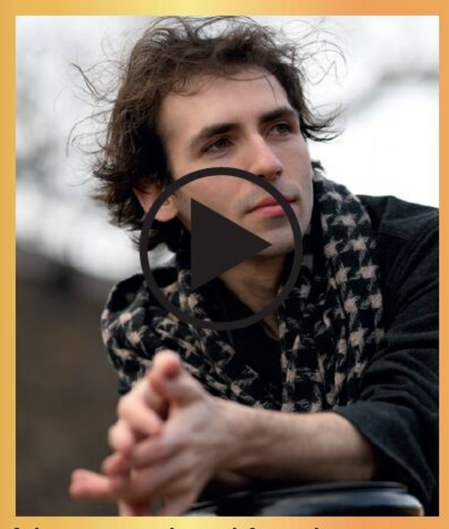


Haochen Zhang

Joseph Middleton



Noriko Ogawa



Alexandre Kantorow

Paul Wee

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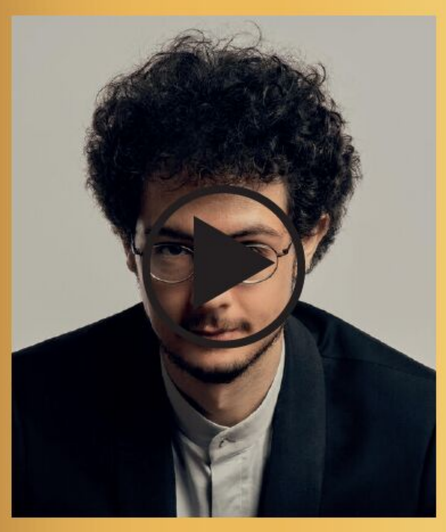

**Left to right:**

Can Çakmur

Yevgeny Sudbin

Ronald Brautigam

Fredrick Ullén

not in the background: but he does create the most amazing foreground for his colleagues. He gives so much inspiration to other musicians, and seems to know what they're going to do before they do it themselves. He can conjure any kind of feeling on the piano. I can't speak highly enough of him. A thoroughbred musician.'

Middleton, the director of the world-class Leeds Lieder Festival, has recorded 13 albums for BIS, accompanying singers such as Carolyn Sampson, Allan Clayton, Iestyn Davies and Roderick Williams. The BIS website has a very useful search box, if you're keen to know more.

Von Bahr is keen to stress that he's rarely interested in one-off projects. If he takes on an artist, it's because he wants to establish a mutually beneficial long-term relationship. And his ear for talent-spotting has led to some real corkers.

## All walks of life

One of the current stars is the young French pianist Alexandre Kantorow. His father, the violinist and conductor Jean-Jacques Kantorow, had already recorded for BIS, and asked von Bahr to listen to a recording of his son. 'I just fell for his playing instantly, and said "yes please" to that recording and anything else he wanted to do. We were utterly convinced by him – a real God-given talent. But even I was surprised by the level of success his recording *À la russe* had.' (BIS-2150.)

When Kantorow entered the Tchaikovsky Competition in 2019, von Bahr had no doubt whatsoever that he would win. 'I was on a very rare holiday with my wife and son in Rome when the competition was on… and I just had to stay in my hotel and listen. I was in Rome, but I didn't see the Vatican! I missed the Trevi Fountain!' His faith was not misplaced. Kantorow duly became the first ever French winner of the competition.

A recording of a certain other pianist was presented anonymously to von Bahr. 'I thought – is this possible? Can someone actually play like this? Evidently it was possible – it had to be a real world star, I was sure. I was prepared to offer my left arm for that tape.' In fact, the player was a practicing barrister from London, Paul Wee, who subsequently recorded Alkan, Thalberg, and transcriptions of Mozart and Beethoven for the label (BIS-2465, 2515, 2615 respectively). 'He's not only a barrister, but at the very top of his profession, working with multinationals and governments. I joke that it must be very difficult for him to afford to play the piano, as he must lose so much money!'

Another 'non-pianist' on the label is Fredrik Ullén, the director of Cognitive Neuropsychology at the Max Planck Institute in Germany: among his many other discs, he recently completed a survey of the 100 Transcendental Studies of the British composer Kaikhosru Sorabji to great acclaim.

## Special memories

Occasionally the recording process can lead to some unexpected moments, as von Bahr discovered when working with the Japanese pianist Yukie Nagai, who has recorded 12 albums for the label. Her first (BIS-246) was of Ravel's *Miroirs*. 'At the time, we were recording in my huge attic, and she was staying as a guest in my house between the sessions. She couldn't play the 'Oiseaux tristes' movement in the way she wanted, so I suggested leaving it until she felt the right moment. At 2.30 in the morning, she crept into my room, woke me up, and said "So sorry, but now is the time! Can we record it?" And she played it incredibly. It was about two minutes longer than her previous ones too. It's so beautiful, that I can't listen to any other performance now.'

Another Japanese pianist was the last artist whom von Bahr recorded in person. His final disc as hands-on producer was Noriko Ogawa's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (BIS-905). 'I was getting more and more pressed for time to do all the other things in the company, and realised I was becoming short-tempered. "Let's finish now! Let's get out of here!" And that's no way to get the best out of an artist.' Ogawa's relationship with the label has continued to flourish: she's recorded 42 discs on BIS.

It's clear that von Bahr wasn't just flimflamming when he stressed the importance of long creative relationships: another artist who has recorded multiple times is the Dutch fortepiano player Ronald Brautigam, who has covered the complete keyboard works of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven (and others) on over 81 discs.

We're coming to the end of our discussion, but von Bahr can't resist highlighting some more names. 'I must mention Can Çakmur: I heard him win the Hamamatsu Competition in Japan, and thought "We don't have space for another pianist… but we can't *not* sign him! He's too important." If a player can tell a story with their hands and minds, we will always want to work with them.'

And to finish where I began, there's also the amazing Haochen Zhang, winner of the 2009 Van Cliburn Competition. Von Bahr tells me he doesn't usually follow competitions (Kantorow and Çakmur were clearly exceptions), so I ask how Zhang came to his notice. 'I happened to know his agent in France; we had a listen and took him immediately, just as we did with Sudbin. It's really quite simple: listen, enjoy, hire.'

Do check out Zhang's amazing *Transcendental Etudes* – they're real firecrackers. And let's hope for (at least) another 50 BIS years of listening, enjoying, and hiring. ■

*Further information at www.bis.se*

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# UP, UP AND AWAY

How difficult can it be to move a piano from point A to point B? Very difficult at times, but the specialist piano moving firms know how to cope, as **John Evans** learns

'I'll tell you how to move a piano: properly.' Vicky Murphy, managing director of F&M Elite Piano Specialists, based in London, is not joking. 'It really is that simple,' she adds. 'Brute strength will get you nowhere. Instead, it takes technique, experience and team work. Get it wrong and not only do you risk damaging the piano but more importantly, yourself.'

Confession time. Around 20 years ago I moved my piano, a large Broadwood Stratford upright, from my dining room to my sitting room. It wasn't too far but the journey involved two very tight turns, the floors were carpeted and there was only me doing it.

First, I tried pushing the piano on its tiny castors but they simply dug into the carpet and in any case, looked to be more decorative than practical. So I went into the kitchen for a rolling pin which, by raising one end of the instrument, I was able to place under the piano with my foot. By pushing the Broadwood like my life depended on it, I was able to roll it slowly over the rolling pin from one room to the other, stopping only to transfer the rolling pin to the front again and manhandle the instrument around the tight doorways. It was an exhausting procedure punctuated by moments of high drama as my piano came perilously close to a door frame or toppling over.

Eventually, I wrestled it to its new home in the sitting room and all was well, at least with the instrument. As for me, a few months later I began suffering lower back pain. For many years it was mild and would come and go depending on what I'd been doing. Now, though, it's constant, albeit still mild. I don't blame my problems squarely on that piano move but I'm convinced there's a link.

It's why, the next time I had cause to move my piano, now an even larger Yamaha YUS5, from my sitting room to my then new soundproofed piano room-cum-office at the rear of my garage, I called in the experts. What heroes. Two of them turned up with moving blankets to protect the instrument and a wheeled loading dolly, scoped out the route and set to, calmly and professionally. It was all over in a matter of minutes.

## Accidents will happen

Moving a piano, whether from just one room to another or one place to another is a risky business. Even the experts can get it

wrong. In 2007, a specialist firm moving a Bösendorfer grand piano for the organisers of the Two Moors Festival in Devon, dropped the instrument when unloading it from the back of their lorry. Penny Aide, the festival's founder, could only look on in horror as the £25,000 instrument she and her team had spent years raising the money to purchase, slid down a bank and landed upside down.

'We are all numb with shock,' she said later. 'It was a Laurel and Hardy moment. It made a noise like 10 honky-tonk pianos being hit by mallets.' Fortunately, the piano moving company did the right thing and in time for the festival's first concert, presented Aide with a new Bösendorfer Imperial worth £85,000.

Forward to 2020 and the pianist Angela Hewitt suffered the painful loss of her piano when movers dropped her Fazioli grand when trying to lift it onto a trolley. The Canadian pianist had just finished a recording session with her instrument fitted, uniquely, with a fourth pedal that brought the entire action slightly closer to the strings. She had owned it for some years and was very distressed.

She said, 'I adored this piano. It was my best friend, best companion. I loved how it felt when I was recording – giving me the possibility to do anything I wanted. I hope my piano will be happy in piano heaven.'

'Some people get very emotional when we collect their piano – an instrument that may have been in their family for 100 years'

**Vicky Murphy, F&M Elite Piano Specialists**

Losing a piano this way is terrible but losing your life moving one is a tragedy of unimaginable proportions. Unfortunately, that's the fate which, in 1989, befell Tommy Gaddis of Montgomery, Alabama. He was in the back of a pick-up truck helping to move a piano when the vehicle reversed over a kerb, causing the instrument to fall. As it toppled over, it struck Gaddis on the head. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

### Ten suitcases and counting

His death certainly puts my back pain into perspective and serves as yet another reminder just how risky, even dangerous, it is to move a piano. Why so? For one thing, they're heavy. Have you been on a plane recently? Do you remember picking up your suitcase weighing the typical 25kg permitted under most baggage allowances? Now imagine trying to pick up 10 of them. That's how heavy a large upright piano is. Even a smaller, entry-level instrument is only around one suitcase lighter. Now consider a grand piano. Even the lightest weighs ten 25kg suitcases but the heaviest, at least 20. And then there's a piano's awkward shape made worse, in the case of an upright, by its unbalanced form, the heavy iron frame located at the rear.

'Pianos are heavy and awkward things and some have unique features that make them more awkward still,' says Jon Kelly, managing director of The Piano Removal Company, based

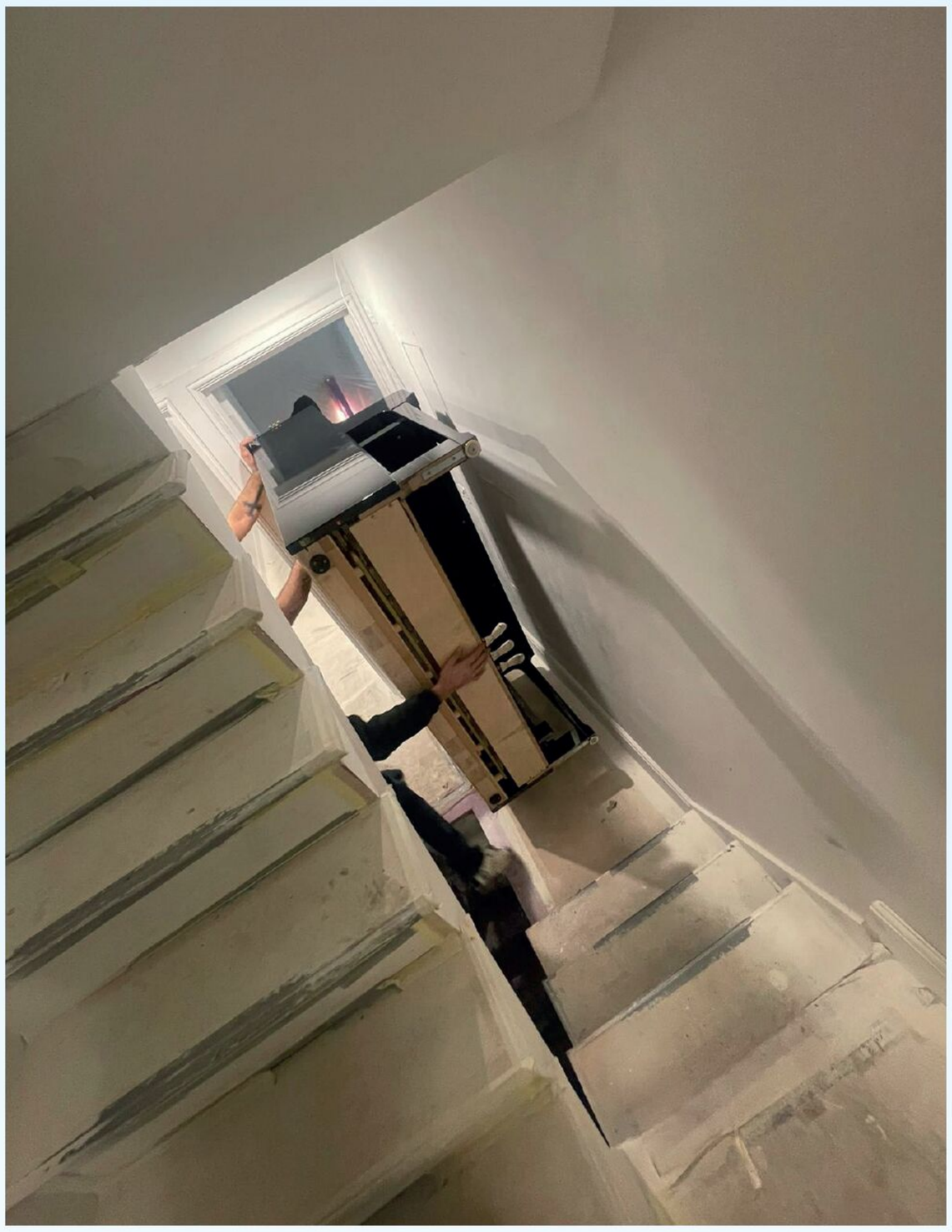
## RESEARCH MATTERS

### How to spot a good piano mover

There are many firms offering to move your piano but some are just home removal companies, while others are contracted by firms you never deal directly with and who can leave you with a damaged piano and out of pocket. Here's what you can expect of a reputable piano mover:

- Their website will be professional-looking and feature recent, positive reviews and testimonials.
- They will be properly insured.
- They won't take cash payment but instead will insist on card or bank transfer and issue a proper invoice and contract.
- They will write a report recording the condition of the piano and the room before and after the move.
- They will scope out the route and plan what they're going to do before they start the job.
- They will remove loose parts from the piano, protect its case with blankets and tie the instrument down securely for transit.
- They will be pleasant, positive and work well together with an unspoken understanding.

Photos courtesy of F&M Elite Piano Specialists and The Piano Removal Company



in Bath and Bristol. ‘For example, on some older Steinway uprights, the frame protrudes from under the piano. The case has a bowed underside to accommodate it which means it won’t sit on the moving trolley properly. Fail to appreciate that and you risk having an accident.

‘Most uprights have a couple of handles at the back. You grip one of them with one hand and the cheek of the instrument [the upright pieces at either end of the keyboard, extending from the case] with your other to move it. Great – but what if the piano doesn’t have a handle because it broke off years ago? You have to work out another way of gripping the instrument securely.’

Kelly’s firm moves up to eight pianos a day, most of them uprights and most, thankfully, into ground floors. ‘No job is the same,’ he says. ‘Not only do pianos differ in terms of weight and size but locations do as well. However a piano is moved, though, what matters is that it’s done safely and with skill.’

This is why, he says, you can’t trust a house mover to move your piano. ‘There may be one guy in the team who moved a piano a few weeks ago. The rest probably never have. It’s a recipe for disaster. Sad to say, casework damage is common when house movers have moved a piano.’

## Mission possible

He cites the example of a team of inexperienced piano movers attempting to get a piano up a flight of stairs. Like a scene from Laurel and Hardy’s *The Music Box* they pushed and pulled but to no avail. ‘There were only two of them when you really need three; one at the upper end pulling and guiding it and two below, holding and pushing, the second standing either to the side of or behind the first as a backstop should the piano begin to fall back.’

All piano movers have their own techniques but according to Kelly, the best have the right mentality, thrive in a team and communicate well. ‘You can be as strong as you like but without the ability to work in a team and support your colleagues, communicate your intentions, often wordlessly, and approach the job cheerfully and willingly, you’ll fail.’

It’s an insightful remark, one that is echoed by Vicky Murphy. ‘When you’re trying to get a piano up a flight of stairs or it’s hanging out of a window, you need a team of people who trust each other and respect each other’s experience. The job is all about skill and technique. Strength is useful but not as important as people might think.’

‘Access is usually the question, rather than the size or shape of a piano’

**Jon Kelly, The Piano Removal Company**

Today, Murphy’s crew is delivering or collecting five pianos. The first job is a Petrof grand which must be taken up a twisting staircase not on its flat side, which is often the way a grand is moved, but on its key bed side. It’s followed by a Yamaha C3; a straightforward delivery to a university. Next, the team is delivering a double harpsichord to a basement flat and then collecting a Yamaha upright for delivery to a third floor. The day ends with a long-haul delivery of a concert grand to Sheffield. Her point is that no job is the same.

### Owners on patrol

'It's why I love it. So many jobs are routine but every piano and every location is different. Customers are different, too, and each has their own story. Some people get very emotional when we collect their piano, an instrument that may have been in their family for 100 years. Some actually wave the piano goodbye. A few months ago, one customer was so tearful I nearly told the guys to take it out of the van and put it back in the house!'

Customers: they can be demanding folk; paranoid, too. 'The worst thing a customer can do is stand and watch as we move the piano,' says Jon Kelly. 'Some even video us. It bothers the team who are probably working out to the last millimetre how to move the piano around a tight corner. Customers have to trust us. The job is all about problem solving and you don't need any distractions.'

One of his most challenging moves, he says, was when a customer wanted their piano moving into the next room – immediately above. 'It was a Bechstein Model B grand and rather than going through the window, which is an expensive business, the customer had cut a hole in the ceiling for us to take it through. Worse still was that the ceiling was around 12 feet high. We had to erect a scaffold tower and then use a hoist to lift the piano to the room above. With our arms raised above our heads, they were at their weakest which made the job extremely scary. In such circumstances, a team really learns to work together. Access is usually the question, rather than the size or shape of a piano.'

Still, surely for a job as simple as moving your piano from one room to another, you don't need the experts. Vicky Murphy disagrees. 'It's too risky and often too difficult. Just last week we had a call from a chap who was decorating his sitting room and had intended to move his grand piano by himself. When we turned up, the piano was on the floor and the legs were on the sofa.'

Jon Kelly tends to agree. 'For the modest amount it will cost you to have it done by experts it really doesn't make sense to move a piano yourself. I speak from experience. When I was 14 my father, who moved pianos, told me to move an upright for him. I did but I then spent the next couple of weeks in hospital recovering. If it can happen to me, it'll happen to you.'■

## PREPARE FOR LIFT-OFF

### How to help your piano mover

They are the experts but a little friendliness and preparation go a long way:

- Send them a video and pictures of the location.
- Trust them – don't watch or, worse, film them.
- Be calm so they start the job with a clear mind.
- Create a clear space free of trip hazards.
- Remove doors if it'll help.

# ALBUM REVIEWS

Reviews by **Peter Quantrill**, **Dave Jones** and **Warwick Thompson**

## YULIANNA AVDEEVA

Resilience: Music by Szpilman, Shostakovich, Weinberg, Prokofiev
**Pentatone** PTC 5187 073
★★★★

Russian pianist Yulianna Avdeeva, a fierce critic of the war in Ukraine, presents works by four composers who used music to express personal resilience against collective horrors. The opening pieces are by Władisław Szpilman, whose memoir of life during the Holocaust became the basis of the film *The Pianist*. As a Jew he was forbidden to play Chopin: this knowledge gives his melancholy little piece 'Mazurek' (1942), a work very much in the style of the composer, a heartrending poignancy. His amusing suite *The Life of the Machines* (1933) is in a more spiky and rat-a-tat style, and sounds as much like a satire on contemporary music as it is on mechanization: Avdeeva is terrific in both works. She's less compelling in Shostakovich's percussive Sonata No 1 and Prokofiev's Sonata No 8, but she brings a memorable bittersweet tristesse to the Adagio of Mieczysław Weinberg's Sonata No 4. **WT**

## ALICE SARA OTT

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No 1, 'Moonlight' Sonata, 'Für Elise' etc
**Deutsche Grammophon** 4864898
★★★★

The virtues of the partnership between Ott and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic under Karina Canellakis make themselves plain from the outset of the First Concerto. This is the best of modern period-style Beethoven, compact and punchy but never clipped or desiccated. Ott finds space to wander into the realm of fantasy in the development section without pulling the pulse out of joint, and her *piano-pianissimo* palette is captured in high definition by the DG engineers. There is even (dare I say it) something of Argerich to the high-velocity articulation of the cadenza, though I find Ott more personable in her vivid portrait of Beethoven the impetuous, 20-something dreamer. The couplings include several old favourites such as the B minor Allegretto and the Op 119 No 1 Bagatelle, and the finale of her 'Moonlight' is richly evocative of its influence on Chopin, but they don't share the striking individuality of the Concerto. **PQ**

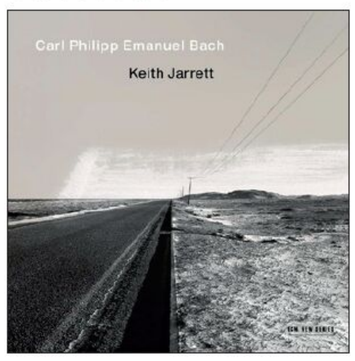
## HIROMI

Sonicwonderland: *Wanted, Sonicwonderland, Polaris, Reminiscence, Utopia* etc
**Telarc** TEL00170
★★★★

The opening track, *Wanted*, is reminiscent of late 80s and 90s albums by major jazz pianists of that era whose albums of original compositions which were centred around a piano trio, often with big-sounding fretless electric bass, and the addition of synthesiser textures and occasional guest musicians. (The late Michel Petrucciani, John Beasley, and a very young Jason Rebello spring to mind.) On *Sonicwonderland* and *Trial and Error* the sonic palette and musical stylings might change to something a little more contemporary, but I'm still hearing the ghost of Petrucciani as the album unfolds, whatever the sonic choices. *Up* sees Hiromi in explosive Michel Camilo Latin groove mode, highlighting her fine technique. The company is great: trumpeter Adam O'Farrill, bassist Hadrien Feraud and drummer Gene Coye all serve the cause with style, helping to make a very enjoyable jazz album, but I'm still looking for a more personal-sounding Hiromi. **DJ**

## KEITH JARRETT

CPE Bach: Württemberg Sonatas Wq49
**ECM** 4858495
★★★★★




With love from one free spirit to another: even Jarrett's loving but idiosyncratic way with *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is no preparation for the joyous and complete meeting of minds on show here. Dedicated to the teenage Duke of Württemberg and published in 1744, this high-point of Late-Baroque, early-piano writing is often as not heard on the harpsichord. Jarrett's touch makes it sound perfectly at home on a modern piano. Those flourishes and runs and spread chords which so often sound clumsy on a modern instrument are brought off in fine style. Paul Griffiths' imaginative booklet note brings out the complex personal and artistic relationship between JS and CPE, father and son, and Jarrett follows suit by not leaning too heavily on a sense of the son stretching creative muscles cramped by his father's rules: CPE's youthful ambition and eccentricity speaks for itself. Made in 1994, the only mystery is why these recordings were left on the shelf for so long. **PQ**

## MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

Fauré: Complete Nocturnes & Barcarolles; *Dolly* Suite
**Hyperion** CDA68331-2
★★★★

Fauré composed in these reflective genres throughout his career, and Hyperion's tracklist usefully prints the date alongside each piece, enabling us to listen as if reading a diary, tracing the development of thought and ideas. The finesse and subtlety of Fauré's writing from early on, however, counts against the listener's grasp of any grand journey. This superficial similarity and elusiveness of mood may account for why many pianists have resisted the challenge to record the Nocturnes and Barcarolles complete, however much they may love individual pieces, and the set is best sampled in instalments. Less playful with rubato than French pianists of earlier generations such as Thyssens-Valentin and Collard, Hamelin is marvellously responsive all the same to the movement of light and water evoked by these pieces, and aided by luminous studio sound. Cathy Fuller joins Hamelin for the *Dolly* Suite, which in context feels like a joyous reward for the close attention demanded by the solo pieces. **PQ**

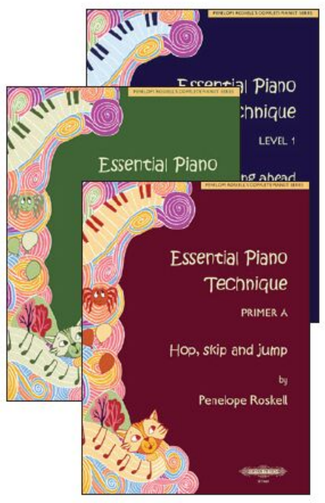
## YUJA WANG

Rachmaninov: Piano Concertos Nos 1-4; *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*
LA Philharmonic/Dudamel
**Deutsche Grammophon** 4864759
★★★★

When she's on form, Yuja Wang is indisputably a superstar. When she's not (and I've seen her be surprisingly disengaged, musically speaking) she can seem just a tad superficial. Fortunately, in these live recordings from the sumptuous acoustic of the Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles, she's cooking with the proverbial gas. She responds sensitively to Rachmaninov's arching melodies with broad and spacious phrasing, and takes obvious delight in the filigree fingerwork. But perhaps an even greater pleasure on the album is Gustavo Dudamel's conducting. He draws a sound from the LA Phil – perfectly balanced brass chords, glossy and shimmering strings, cool woodwind solos – which is so utterly luxurious as to be almost overwhelming, and his interplay with the soloist is thoughtful and responsive. Wang's performance might not be as fresh and distinctive as Boris Giltburg's recent offering on Naxos, but, that said, it's still gorgeously easy on the ear. **WT**

# SHEET MUSIC REVIEWS

Reviews by **Michael McMillan**




## ESSENTIAL PIANO TECHNIQUE

Primer A, Primer B, Level 1

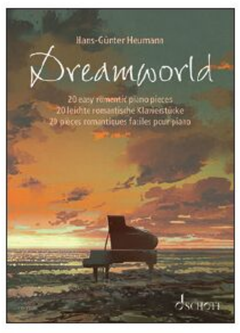
Penelope Roskell

**Edition Peters**

Penelope Roskell's 558-page wonderful tome on piano technique *The Complete Pianist* was published three years ago but I suspect its sheer magnitude, length, and cost, will have restricted its appeal to the average consumer. These three new accessible technique books are based on the principles laid out in *The Complete Pianist* and can be used profitably alongside whatever method or course a student is following up to Grade 1.

Whilst many books on technique provide musical exercises to improve one's technical ability, Roskell's approach places greater emphasis on developing effective physical movements to produce the best musical outcomes. So, from the very first pages in Primer A, the student works on arm movements such as 'floating balloon' and 'mitten flops' and finger strengthening exercises like 'creeping caterpillars.' A few bars of music help to establish good technical habits. C major, A minor, and B major scales are introduced at the end of Primer B, and the hands play together for the first time in Level 1, where the material also includes chords, broken chords, and chromatic scales. Teaching notes are provided at the end of each book, which include learning objectives, teaching tips, references to complementary pages in *The Complete Pianist*, recommended repertoire, and QR codes that allow access to video demonstrations.

The general presentation is targeted towards children, and any child that heeds Roskell's advice will develop a solid technical foundation. In sum, this is a fantastic set of beginner technique books that will hopefully be followed by further additions to the series.




## DREAMWORLD

Hans-Günter Heumann

**Schott**

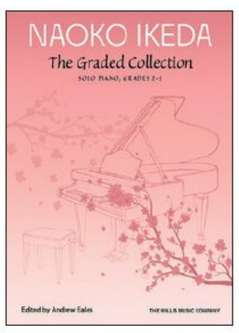
Hans-Günter Heumann regularly appears in this column as both a composer and arranger of music geared towards beginner to intermediate pianists. *Dreamworld* is a collection of 20 original compositions around Grades 2-4 that are between two to four pages long. None of these dreamy, relaxing pieces have more than one accidental in their key signature, and they contain relatively few chords. Plenty of repetitive devices, such as recycling a phrase an octave higher or varying the texture help to speed up the note-learning process, and the predictable harmony and direction of the music is easy on the ears. I imagine younger students might prefer more vigour even in their dreams but if the gentle mood suits, there's plenty here to get stuck into.

## BACH ARR. GOUNOD

Méditation (Ave Maria)

**Henle**

The popularity of Gounod's arrangement of Bach's Prelude in C is reflected in the plentiful versions available of the work for all sorts of different instrument combinations. The work was originally titled *Méditation*, but it is often referred to as *Ave Maria* due to the text of the words when it is sung. This version published by Henle is Gounod's transcription of the piece, and is based on the first edition published by Heugel in 1853, with all the fingering copied across. If you'd like to make things a little easier, you can do what all online recordings appear to do – omit the second verse, in which the right-hand melody is played in octaves, and cut to the final four bars.

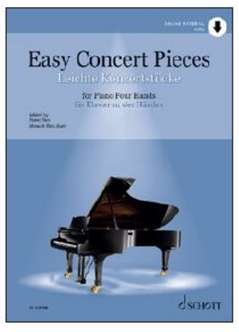



## NAOKO IKEDA

The Graded Collection

**The Willis Music Company**

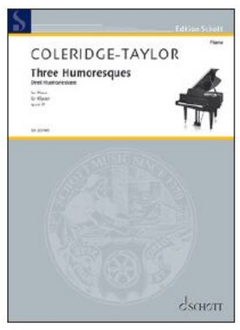
Having recently curated a Graded Collection of William Gillock's piano music, Andrew Eales has now done the same for Naoko Ikeda, selecting six pieces each at Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 for a generous total of 24 pieces. Ikeda ranks amongst the best of Japanese composers writing piano music for developing pianists and her compositional ethos is strongly influenced by Gillock. All her music is similarly creative, purposeful, and pedagogically inspired. The musical text size decreases as the pieces get harder, and a paragraph of editorial notes about each piece completes an excellent introduction to this composer. If you haven't come across Ikeda yet, add this to your basket now!




## EASY CONCERT PIECES FOR PIANO FOUR HANDS

**Schott**

The 20 pieces in this book cover a good range of material, presented chronologically from a Rondo by JC Bach and ending with the first movement of Ligeti's Sonatina (which is strikingly similar to part of the composer's *Musica Ricercata*) and Peter Wottrich's *Little Prince on Asteroid B 612*. Most of the pieces are well-known duets, and helpful editorial fingerings and hand distributions are included. Online recordings of each part provide useful support when learning the pieces. Just one quibble about presentation – I much prefer duets to be printed in vertical alignment, and when they're printed on facing pages, as they are here, it would make it easier to cross-reference if the positioning of bars match each other.

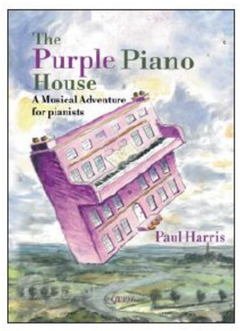



## COLERIDGE-TAYLOR

Three Humoresques

**Schott**

Coleridge-Taylor's piano music has had something of a renaissance recently. His Impromptu in B minor is an attractive choice on ABRSM's Grade 8 syllabus, and has been recorded alongside a few other of his works by Isata Kanneh-Mason. Schott have recently released new editions of several pieces, and the *Three Humoresques* Op 31 are the latest additions to their catalogue. Composed in 1897, these are playful works whose lively characters are reflected in their tempo markings – *presto*, *molto vivace*, and *allegro assai* – with lyrical passages providing contrast. Despite their speed, these are all approachable by Grade 8 pianists and one hopes that Schott will continue to publish more of this neglected music.




## THE PURPLE HOUSE

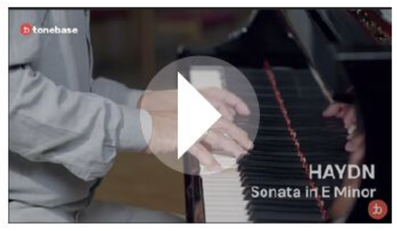
Paul Harris

**Queen's Temple Publications**

'Zump and Soodi were brother and sister and they lived in a normal house in a normal town and did normal things.' Thus begins a story by Sam Edenborough about *The Purple Piano House*, which is a house shaped like a piano that can fly when its owners, Professor Hammer and his wife, Professor Key, play the appropriate tune on their spiral staircase made of enormous piano keys. Accompanying this story are 20-odd short and simple interludes, composed by esteemed music educator Paul Harris, the longest of which are three lines long. Totalling 178 bars across 15 pages, difficulty is around Grade 1, and the majority of the music is written in C. An interesting concept that may pique the imagination of children.

**TAP TO WATCH**
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet plays Mozart

**TAP TO WATCH**
Jean Efflam Bavouzet teaches Haydn



# Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

## The charming French pianist on what he's learned from performing – and recording – the Mozart piano concertos

**You began the complete Mozart Piano Concertos cycle for Chandos in 2016. What has the journey been like so far?**
The first idea was to just record the six concertos Mozart wrote in 1784. But the chemistry between Gàbor Takàcs-Nagy and the Manchester Camerata was just too great to stop there! From the fourth recording we decided to include opera overtures written at the same period as the concertos, to emphasise their operatic qualities. So many slow movements are like arias without words!

**Mozart's final two concertos appear on the latest Vol 8, including the amazing B flat K595.**
K595 is definitely a sublime concerto with beautiful themes and sometimes hair-raising modulations, but working on K537 will remain for me the biggest surprise of the entire cycle. It was by far the one I had the least interest in until I realised that Mozart is deliberately writing on two different levels in this piece: On the one side, there are rather simple tunes and configurations that could almost sound banal, and on the other a structure of complex polyphony and harmonies directly influenced by Bach. Plus, if you add the fact that it has the biggest piano part, I find all these unique features utterly fascinating.

**There are more volumes to come, of course?**
We will shortly record the seven earliest concertos, then finish with the ones for two and three pianos.

**What makes your partnership with Gábor Takács-Nagy and the Manchester Camerata so unique?**
With Gabor we speak the same language. Our motto for these recordings is 'don't take anything for granted'. We have an almost spooky understanding in musical matters, enhanced by a spooky list of analogies in our private lives. It is also a beautiful experience with the Manchester Camerata to find that after all these recordings and concerts together, we go exactly in the same direction and understand each other's intentions almost without saying a word.

**Did you grow up on the Mozart concertos?**
Growing up is a complex process. A young musician does not escape from it. You adore *Don Giovanni*. You play the D minor K466 Concerto endlessly. You admire Friedrich Gulda. You cannot get away from the second movement of the K467 Concerto. One of your greatest movie favourites is *Amadeus*. You live with the last movement of the E flat K482 in your ears for long periods… it goes on.

**What have you learnt along the way, in terms of technique?**
The list is long! Of course, the even passagework and the singing tone without much pedal. As Solti [Georg] told me when I played the C minor K491 Concerto for him: 'Sing, sing, but in tempo!' The right voicing of chords and of polyphonic writing; the need of attention to very carefully proportioned balance between the two hands; the very precise and 'breathing' phrasing.

**And in terms of musicality?**
The musical discourse is highly operatic and has a close relation with the dialogue between soloist and orchestra. What I find most amazing are the constant changes, microscopic or monumental. A phrase starts with a statement but with a pirouette of a few notes Mozart already takes us somewhere else, sometimes with a smiling wink of the eye, sometimes to a sudden depth of the soul where not everything is cheerful and the ultimate truth of human existence is expressed with mind-boggling precision. Those are classical music's stellar moments. And I had a lot of pleasure choosing the cadenzas: by Badura-Skoda, Hummel, Gulda and the young Kenneth Broberg who includes quite anachronistically a quote of 'La Marseillaise' in KV503. Speaking of anachronism, I myself wrote some quite jazzy cadenzas for K175 and K453 and I suspect some eyebrows were raised, which is even more delightful!

**Do you think every pianist, whether amateur or professional, should learn Mozart?**
Do you ask the sun to come up every morning?

**As a result of your monumental and much-admired Haydn and Beethoven recordings, some might pigeon-hole you as a 'Classical player'. Does that bother you?**
After the Haydn sonatas, then the Beethoven sonatas and concertos, and now the Mozart, it is just fantastic – and so satisfying for the mind – to be wholly taken by an artform of the greatest composers. I would actually be rather proud to be considered a 'Classical player'! But then where does that leave the complete Debussy and Ravel, the Bartók and Prokofiev concertos, Falla, Grieg, Ives, Sancan and so on? I am so grateful to Chandos who continuously give me the possibility to cover the repertoire I feel close to. Chandos is like my second family! I just want to be called a 'musician'. ■

*Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's Mozart Piano Concertos Volume 8 is out on 6 October (Chandos 20246).*

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